POTENTIAL FOR CONFLICT AND HARMONY

Edited by
Sebastian Painadath

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P.T. Mathew in his well-studied and systematic paper explains first the paradox of religions and examines how the secular discourse responds to it. He finds inadequacies in the secular approach and advocates that the dimensions of religion-related conflicts have to be understood on religious grounds. With this he explores how the resources of conflict-resolution are present like hidden well-springs in religions themselves. The motivation that religion gives to promote justice and solidarity has in fact positive secular effects in civic life. In spite of the ambiguities religion thus becomes an integrative force in the formation of national and international communities.

Sanal Mohan argues that a secular discourse on religion has a great significance in resolving religion-based conflicts. George Karakkunnel affirms that conflictual tendency is not intrinsic to religion, but it needs to be checked by a new humanising re-interpretation of the sources of religions. A. K. Ramakrishnan thinks that a conflict transformation approach, where the dynamic character of conflicts can be captured, would be more useful than a conflict resolution model where resolution would mean a finality. Sebastian Painadath explores how the mystical and prophetic undercurrents of religions can be an effective antidote to the malaise of conflicts provoked by religions.

Jose Kuriedath analyses the associational and institutional structures of Christianity and examines how they were prone to cause conflicts. He finds that a Christian community tends to get into conflict with other communities when the vested interests of power and wealth come to domination. He shows how the pristine message of Jesus actually motivates peace and harmony.

Ignatius Jesudasan examines the views of Mahatma Gandhi on religion. Gandhiji, well known for genuine respect for the plurality of religions, found that conflicts arise, when one religion tends to impose its metaphors and claims on other religions. Jesudasan shows how the message of Jesus, as Gandhiji rightly understood it, could be an antidote to religious intolerance.

Though the perspectives of these articles on the issue of conflicts and their resolutions on the religious landscape differ, all seem to agree that a creative dialogue between religious agencies and secular forces can play a great role in analysing the malaise of the conflicts provoked by religions, and to explore ways of resolving them.

Sebastian Painadath

Religion, Conflict and Conflict-Resolution: Sociological Perspectives

P.T. Mathew

P.T. Mathew, who holds a doctorate in Christian Studies from the University of Madras, is the Director of Studies at the Jesuit Regional Theology Centre, Kalady. His paper is a sociological inquiry into the linkage between the phenomenon of religion with the reality of conflict/violence, keeping the Indian context as the background. He argues that the dominant secularist discourse has been largely inadequate in effectively dealing with conflicts of a religious nature, and affirms the importance of utilizing resources within religions themselves to effectively deal with the issue. After considering the major dimensions of religion-related conflict he explores some of the resources within religions: orientation to forgiveness and reconciliation, openness to dialogue with religions and ideologies, urge to fight for justice and human rights, etc.

1. Introduction

Religion today is looked upon more widely as being responsible for fuelling conflict worldwide. There is no denying that religion has been a major cause of much violence and bloodshed in human history. Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' theory, though largely discredited, tried to give another face to the phenomenon of religion on the global stage. Indian writers in general frame their discourse around the blanket term 'communalism', a coinage of the secular nationalists, and used mostly in a pejorative sense. Religion, here, gets reduced to religious fundamentalism, which is equated with communalism that is seen as evil incarnate. It is time that the issue of inter-religious relations including that of conflict between religions is approached from a broader and dispassionate platform. We have arrived at a historical juncture where religion can no longer be ignored as a vanishing myth or an insignificant nuisance. The fact that religion constitutes a key element in the formation of society is essential to a proper understanding

of society. The history of human societies is inseparable from people's quest to comprehend the world around and the possible relationship with what they considered divine.

Two concerns make our task urgent:

i. The recurring incidents of religion-related conflicts of varied intensity in the Indian context, raise questions about the potential of religious traditions to be a source of conflict and violence.

ii. The global climate is characterised by conflicts increasingly of a religious nature; the 9/11 attack on the WTC in the U.S, Israeli-Palestine conflict, war against Iraq, the border conflict between India and Pakistan, etc. have an obvious religious tone. There is a growing perception that conflict and violence are apparently committed in the name of religion and God.

The complex interplay of religion, caste or ethnic identities, economic interests and political ideologies make our task not an easy one. This complexity is inviting us to take a fresh look at the phenomenon we call religion, devoid of ideological baggage. Our inquiry is to find out whether and how religious traditions give rise to religious conflict and violence, and to search if religions have resources within them to deal with conflicts effectively. Every religious conflict is conflict between religious communities, not between religions in the abstract. What we come across daily are 'men and women of faith', or 'followers of one faith tradition or another' in constant interaction. The rich panorama of humanity's religious heritage, as well as the uniquely multi-religious context of India provide us with a wonderful canvass to work on.

2. The Paradox of Religion

Religion, from a sociological point of view, presents an ambivalent picture in relation to conflict and violence. On the one hand religion is seen as closely related to social cohesion and integration. On the other hand, both history and contemporary experience paint religion as a major force contributing to social conflict and even violence. How to understand and explain these contradictory claims?

The functionalist school of sociology looks at religion as the essential integrating and legitimating force in society. It provides an overarching

frame of values in helping to unite people through common symbols, norms and goals. It assumes that society is relatively a stable structure of functionally integrated elements, and that religion is one element contributing to the maintenance of the equilibrium and as an expression of the social cohesion of a community. "Participation in certain religious rituals appears to reduce the sense of boundaries between participants, producing an experience of unity. ... Both language and ritual articulate the unity of the group and serve to separate that group from others." (McGuire, 151). Thomas O'Dea lists 6 functions of religion which include its supportive, sacralizing, prophetic and identity functions. He is, at the same time, careful to add 6 dysfunctions of religion too, including its divisive and intolerance- generating role besides its acting as opiate (Hamilton, ch.10). Critics say that these may apply to all social institutions as much as to religion, and that the functions of a religion in a specific social context would be variable. The fact is that religion may contribute to both social cohesion and to social conflict depending upon the environment in which it exists.

A close look at the phenomenon reveals that cohesion and conflict need not be contradictory; these are but two sides of the same coin. Conflict is only the obverse of social cohesion. Not rarely conflict is an integral part of what holds groups together. Religion's attempt at unifying a group implies, at the same time, its demarcation and even conflict with another group. McGuire observes it well: "Religion is (thus) an important factor in social conflict, both within the group and with outsiders. This potential for conflict results both from qualities of religion and religious groups themselves and from the nature of the society as a whole. Nevertheless, the aspect of conflict is basically the obverse of social cohesion; a certain amount of conflict is part of the very structure that holds groups together. And because religion is one important way by which groups express their unity, it is also a significant factor in conflict ." (McGuire, 166). Integration theories may help in understanding homogeneous societies where religion remains coextensive with society. But in heterogeneous societies where competing religions occupy the same social space, or where conflicting societies share the same religion, this approach is hardly helpful. The Indian situation falls clearly in the latter category.

Conflict can be seen as a neutral concept referring to two diverse realities that are not in agreement, as in conflict of opinions or viewpoints. The same can be extended to two persons or parties or nations. Conflict is an inevitable part of human social life as a common mechanism of releasing creative energy within, and is indicative of the inner dynamism of any human collectivity. Therefore it is necessary to distinguish conflict from violence, which is value-laden, and seen as something undesirable, or even harmful. Conflict may grow into acts of violence or riots or pogroms, but not necessarily. Our assumption, when we speak of 'conflict between religions' is that of conflict that is oriented to violence. The distinction between illegal violent acts and legally sanctioned action is important and not always easy to make, as implied in concepts like counter-violence. What appears illegal to one may be legitimate to another, depending on the context and the position of the viewer, ie., whether one is a victim or a perpetrator. Counter insurgency or crusades or militant *jihad* may become legitimate acts or brute violence, depending on which side one is.

3. The Secularist Discourse

The philosophy of secular democracy traces its origin to the Greek city states and was eventually developed by thinkers like John Locke and Jacques Rousseau. But it was G.L.Holyoake of Britain who coined the term 'secularism' to define an ideology that was emerging from the values of the Enlightenment. Its central maxim was the separation of church / religion from public life. Scientific reasoning and the moral claims of the secular society were projected as replacing religion and theology in determining the nature and destiny of human societies. Following this line Indian secularists argue that religion, though not unrelated to politics, should be restricted to one's personal life, and should be allowed no role in public affairs or institutions. The secularists form an influential group in the ongoing discussion on inter-religious conflict in contemporary India.

Secularism, in spite of the different shades it displays (Vanaik, ch.3), can be outlined along some broad trajectories. Generally it tends to give a socio-economic explanation to the phenomenon of religious conflicts; the theory of relative deprivation is applied to trace the roots

of conflicts to socio-economic marginalization/exclusion, the assumption being that these conflicts would vanish if material well-being is ensured for all people. The secularists affirm that the overarching religious categories like Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, etc. are relatively recent, and did not exist before the late 19th century. They view the colonial rulers mainly responsible for the spread of communal thinking and the resultant violence in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, often as a counter-strategy against a growing Indian nationalism. They tend to glorify the pre-colonial and early colonial periods as one of interreligious symbiosis and amity. The perception that religion is false consciousness leads to view the 20th century religious conflicts as initiated by 'communal ideologies' which are 'basically over clashing economic interests'. So it calls for the elimination, or at least the suppression of religion blocking the secular path to progress.

The secularist view makes a clear-cut distinction between 'religious' and 'communal'. Religion is seen solely as a matter of personal faith and reverence for a particular set of beliefs, rituals and images. 'Communal' is used not in its Anglo-American sense meaning someone who is altruistic and civic-minded, but in its specifically Indian meaning referring to "one whose exclusive attachment to his or her community is combined with an active hostility against other communities which share its geographical and political space." (Kakar 1995, 17). Communalism is more a collective affair which produces an individual's identification with a community not only in matters religious "but also with its political, economic, social and cultural interests and aspirations. This identification is accompanied by the strong belief that these interests not only diverge from but also in actual conflict with the interests of other communities." (Kakar, 17).

The secularist approach is inadequate not only in understanding the depth dimension of the Indian social reality, but also in addressing the phenomenon of religion-related conflict effectively, as the history of half a century illustrates. Kakar outlines some of the fallacies of the secularist position:

> It tends to play down the dark side of interreligious relations, including conflicts, in the history of our country. In fact conflicts

of a religious nature are not only a product of the colonial period, but also have occurred in pre-colonial times. There are references to riots between followers of Vishnu and Shiva, instances of religious persecution under Muslim rulers like Aurangazeb and Tippu Sultan, and of conflicts between Catholics and Protestants.

The secular analysts tend to focus on factors other than religion as the root cause of an apparently religious conflict, presenting the cause as a clash of economic or political interests, or a version of class struggle. This is only partially true. Religion cannot be left out as a non-factor in religious conflicts.

The secularists tend to deny the role of religion in human interactions, and to demand its exclusion from all public life, as sole remedy for all religious conflicts. It does not tally with contemporary experience, nor is it supported by the findings of sociology of religion. (Kakar, 239ff)

Some ardent advocates of secularism use the derogatory term 'anti-secularists' to refer to those who consider secularism inadequate in addressing religion-related conflicts (Vanaik, 152ff). However, to those who feel the inadequacy, a different approach to the issue becomes inevitable.

4. Dimensions of Religion-related Conflict

a) Socio-political factors

There can be two basic orientations regarding religion's relationship with the public or political sphere of society. One tries to restrict it to the personal life, with emphasis on individual's religious experience and personal enlightenment, etc. World rejecting traditions like Theravada Buddhism and some Pentecostal denominations are examples. Modern secularists also assign religion to the private realm, though for different reasons. The second orientation views religion as oriented to social engagement and social well-being. Every aspect of life including political roles is not devoid of a religious quality. When Gandhi says "my religion is my politics, and my politics is my religion", it has to be understood in the latter sense. Some may point to theocratic states as an extreme form of this orientation. Our discussion here looks at religion in the latter sense, as a factor closely intertwined

with public or political life. It also agrees with the insights from contemporary research in the sociology of religion which acknowledges *community* or the collective human aspect as one of the four constitutive elements of the phenomenon of religion, the other three being a *bunch of rituals, system of beliefs* and *code of conduct*.

Religious conflict and violence occur in the civil society, in the public sphere, never in the private. Religious communities in any society characterised by religious diversity would find themselves automatically placed in the public sphere. Religion has a right to protect the interests of its followers in the affairs of the civil society, and hence becomes part of the political sphere on account of its concern with 'resource-distribution'. Religious communities have a rightful interest in getting a fair share of resources that are publicly distributed, usually through state apparatus, and organized efforts to ensure it can lead to conflict not only with the state but also with other 'rival' religious communities. The ongoing discourse in Kerala around 'self-financing institutions', with its accent on community wise ownership and distribution, illustrates this conflict well. Such conflicts can be seen as inevitable part of political process in a democratic setting. Other examples include struggles for religious liberty, conflict over minority rights, etc. If the state fails to resolve such conflicts through consensus, it may even escalate into violent action, depending on the militant capacity of the group. A few observations are in order: (i) religious diversity alone is no sufficient reason for religious conflict, as many a research testifies; (ii) religion-inspired conflict becomes more probable when religious differences correspond with other differences like caste, class, language, or ethnicity; (iii) where the state identifies itself with one religion, probability of conflict among religions increases. (iv) there is greater likelihood of conflict when one religious community dominates or wields undue influence or amasses disproportionate wealth or assets; (v) weakness of the state/civil society in adequately dealing with issues of deprivation, discrimination or other forms of injustice, can provide a fertile ground for religious conflict and violence.

The construction of religious communities in India is seen as closely related to the process of nation-building. Numerous communities existed, and continue to exist in India in terms of caste, ethnicity or

religious tradition from time immemorial. But their transformation into distinct and mutually antagonistic 'religious communities' was aided to a large extent by the census exercise. Religion was introduced as a fundamental category in census of India from1872, and that facilitated the artificial merger of disparate communities merely on the basis of religion with the accompanying democratic consciousness built on that identity. This colonial heritage continues even today. (Bhagat, 4352ff).

It may appear anomalous that there is probability of more religion-related conflicts in a democratic set-up than under military dictatorship or royal rule. But it has to be understood properly. Questions of rights of communities get submerged under concerns of law and order in non-democratic societies where the rulers remain distant and inaccessible, while these get sharply focussed when people have a political voice. Kakar puts it well: "It is only with self government, when distance disappears, that the political questions – 'who *among us* shall have power here, in these villages, these towns?', 'will the majority group dominate us?', 'what will be the new ranking order?' – lead to a heightened awareness of religious-cultural differences…. The self assertion of 'we are' with its potential for confrontation with the 'we are' of other groups, is inherently a carrier of aggression, together with the consequent fears of a persecution, and is thus always attended by a sense of risk and potential for violence. " (Kakar 241-43). Studies by Wilkinson help to understand the close connection between communal violence and electoral processes in a democratic state (Wilkinson 2004, 2005).

Sometimes religious conflicts come to mask other more fundamental conflicts like ethnic or caste-related conflict. This is frequently the case in complex situations since religious boundaries overlap with other boundary markers, making it difficult to distinguish a religious conflict from other social conflicts. Studies show that the possibility of conflict increases where religious boundaries are co-extensive with political boundaries. The decades-old Indo-Pakistan conflict or the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict act as pointers.

b) *Theological factors*

We may find scriptural texts in every religion supportive of

aggression on people of other faiths, but rarely do religions give explicit calls for assault, especially in modern times. In contemporary societies religions' contribution to conflict and violence of a religious nature has to be located more in the realm of 'theological legitimation'. Legitimation means the social recognition or a declaration that a role, or a ritual or an action is in accordance with the accepted principles and norms of the given group. Religion legitimates and thus endorses roles by 'locating' them within a sacred and cosmic frame of reference, thus giving them a sense of immortality. At the subjective level religious legitimation gives individuals an ultimate sense of rightness in the role that he or she plays in society. (Berger, Ch. 2).

Religious legitimation may be at work not only in the violator, but also in the victim. Religious violence tends to develop its own theology of suffering or resistance, drawing from the treasury of the respective scriptures and doctrines. "The theologies of suffering have always appealed to the victims, just as the religious justification of aggression has ruled the conscience of the victors. Thus suffering can be justified as the will of God as karma carried over from an earlier birth." (Heredia, 64). Such a theology places the responsibility squarely on the victims themselves or their gods, rather than on the perpetrators of violence. The myth of *swarga* and *naraka*, the belief in karma or resurrection, the symbol of martyrdom, etc. are powerful tools of legitimation in religious traditions. (This is not to deny the liberative potential of some of these symbols.)

Truth claims are essential ingredients of every religion, and these often take the form of exclusivism in relation to other religious traditions. Religious exclusivism is the viewing of one's own religion as the only legitimate religion to the rejection of all else. It makes absolute truth claims which says one's beliefs are completely true and others' are not. Exclusivist worldviews, many point out, encourage intolerance and prejudice towards other religious groups, and hence tend to promote conflict. Exclusivism always involves the existence of an 'outgroup' with which it compares itself in a multi-religious situation, though its intensity may vary. The sense of comparison and opposition becomes necessary ingredients. Often it is accompanied by a sense of triumphalism over the other group, and this provides a

fertile ground for militant mobilization of the members to safeguard truth claims. If crusades and the aggressive missionary ventures are seen as expressions of Christian exclusivism, militant *jihad* (holy war) is shown as a prototype of the Islamic mode giving religious legitimacy to militancy.

Exclusivism is hardly separable from monotheism, the belief in the existence of one God. In the great monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam the belief system is determined by the conception of God as one unique and personal being. This monotheistic conviction has an inherent tendency to reject other religious traditions as false and as idolatry. Many fanatical and violent turns in human history can be traced back to this reality. Can we say exclusivism is the real problem in religious conflicts? A closer look will show that the basic problem is not with exclusivism as such. Truth claims are essential ingredients of religion, and they are by nature exclusive. But these claims are to be understood within the framework and specific mode of religious discourse. These may be understood as: "other beliefs are false in so far as they are incompatible with my beliefs". In other words, condemnation of exclusivism as total evil is the result of ignorance about the modes and implications of religious language. An unbiased look at religious exclusivism may reveal, at the same time, the rich resources within religion that can contribute to the resolution of the problem.

If exclusivism is in consonance with monotheistic religions, the phenomenon of religious appropriation is a parallel process often present in other world religions like Hinduism. Since this point is related to the question of identity, it shall be discussed in the next section.

The question of conversion

The issue of conversion has become a major point of debate in India, not only as a religious issue, but also as a socio-political issue, and discussions are often marred by emotions. Accusations of organised attempts at mass conversion of illiterate people through inducement or force at times lead to attacks on religious personnel and institutions. As a result, orientation to conversion is perceived widely as a key factor inducing religious conflict. Certainly India has

a long history of organized religious conversion, especially among the Dalit and Tribal people, not only by Christians, but also by Muslims and Buddhists; so the fear is not totally without reason. The statement of Arun Shourie has to be seen in this context: "(T)he singular objective of all churchmen in India is conversion, or to use their terms, the harvesting of souls for Jesus" (Shourie, 49). Defence of conversion is built on the constitutional right to freedom of religion which includes not only the right "to profess, practice and propagate religion", but also the right to change one's religion. After discussing the five forms of the complex phenomenon of conversion Michael Minj argues that opposition to conversion is a gross denial of the right to a meaningful human existence. He writes: "When powerful individuals or institutions deny to tribals the right to convert, they deny them the right of self-transformation, self determination, decision and freedom – a right intrinsic to individuals and communities." (Minj, 500). Anti-conversion legislation already enacted or in the making in many states, naturally induces fear of its misuse against minority religious groups.

The core of the issue, however, is the conflict between two worldviews – the worldview of missionary religions on the one hand, and of the Indic religions, on the other. (The term *Indic* is used here to refer to the religious traditions and cultures having their origin in the Indian subcontinent). Indic and Semitic religions seem to attribute mutually exclusive properties to religion. In the Indic worldview religion consists of a variety of paths an individual can take to attain *moksha;* all religions lead to the same goal, and so no religion can be false. Religion is the ancestral tradition of a people that has passed on from generation to generation; one is born into a faith tradition and so change of religion is an anomaly. Many Hindus find organised conversion drives offensive and as assault on the dignity and self respect of a people and violence done to a tradition. Christians and Muslims, on the other hand, say that some religions are false, and consider it their duty to lead their followers to the true religion. Attempts to remedy conflicts through legislation alone overlooking the deeper conflict of worldviews will be futile. Is the state and the political machinery capable of dealing with the issue of worldviews? The 'irreconcilable differences' between religions that Derrida speaks of cannot be

ignored, and the issue needs to be addressed from a different platform that explores the resourcefulness of religious traditions themselves.

c) *Religious Conflicts as related to questions of Cultural Identity*

Religion, next to family, is considered the second oldest institution that governs the social as well as personal behaviour of human persons. I take the view that conflict between religions needs to be addressed from a platform that gives due recognition to the reality of religion in human lives. Religious conflicts not infrequently are related to people's quest for cultural identity. In fact these cannot be understood apart from the attempts of a religious community to preserve and protect its tradition and heritage by a retrieval of doctrines, beliefs and practices from a sacred past. Identity consciousness of one form or another accompanies every individual from childhood, and has its base in the division of humans into mutually exclusive group identities of tribe, caste, nation, religion or class. These differentiations serve to increase a feeling of well-being and belonging by locating one's own group at the centre, different and superior to other groups. Legends, myths and rituals help to maintain this identity which operates mostly at the preconscious level. Cultural identity refers to "a group's basic way of organizing experience through its myths, memories, symbols, rituals and ideals. … it makes a decisive contribution to the enhancement of an individual's sense of self-sameness and continuity in time and space" (Kakar, 184). Identity is socially produced, and so is subject to historical change, and does not remain static. What is important is that we accept the reality of our identity consciousness at work in society, and not to deny its existence.

Every construction of identity demands a process of distancing from other groups, demarcating the boundaries as clearly as possible. Boundary maintenance has a two-fold function: to affirm and protect the unity of the group and to highlight the difference and the uniqueness of the group in relation to other groups. Religious rituals and moral code of conduct, as well as faith articulations are the usual means. Though present in every religious tradition, boundary has a central place in Semitic religions, with their centrally established canon and authority structure. The cognitive boundary sets 'us' up over against

'them'. 'We' have a shared central experience and history, which 'they' don't share. Initiation rites and 'rites of passage' have a vital link with boundary demarcation and maintenance. Socialization of children primarily aims at integrating them into the group, marking out the cognitive boundary, and developing a sense of religious belonging. This cognitive framework may provide them with images of 'out-groups' not only as different, but also as inferior and at times hostile. Prejudices thus built up at childhood can go a long way in creating inimical relationships between religious communities, as is evident from many a malicious propaganda, manipulated text book, and hate campaign in our country in the recent past.

Amartya Sen is right in drawing our attention to the multiplicity of identities that we humans are blessed with; we all belong simultaneously to a great variety of groups in terms of citizenship, residence, geographical origin, gender, class, etc. All of these collectivities give the person a particular identity and "none of them can be taken to be the person's only identity or singular membership category." (Sen, 5). However, Sen seems to overlook the fact that all identities do not have the same value in human life, and that religion, like caste and language, have a primordial quality that provides an encompassing worldview in people's search for meaning through the medium of myths and symbols. Identity consciousness, hence, may become a source of conflict with other groups, involving not only worldviews, but also emotional energy. "Religion brings to conflict between groups a greater emotional intensity and a deeper motivational thrust than language, region or other markers of ethnic identity.... With the historical allusions from sacred rather than profane history, its metaphors and analogies having their source in sacred legends, the religious justification of a conflict involves fundamental values and releases some of our most violent passions." (Kakar, 247-48)

The sense of primordial identity normally functions at a preconscious level, which may surface to the conscious level only when there is a perceived threat to it. In normal course people are indifferent to one's culture, including language, ethnic origin or religion. Incidents like riot, persecution, discrimination, attack on cultural symbols, etc. can lead to a sudden irruption of the unconscious energy.

Religious conflict often becomes a result of attempts by a religious community to preserve or defend its identity against external threats. In the Indian context such attempts are too easily labelled as fundamentalism. Referring to the history of Hindu-Muslim conflicts in India, Kakar states that "fundamentalism is the third Muslim response to the loss of collective self-identifications and the fracture in self-representation brought on by historical changes" (Kakar, 218). He further observes: "(I)f we look closely at individual cases around the world, we will find that the much touted revival is less of religiosity than of cultural identities based on religious affiliation. ... What we are witnessing today is less the resurgence of religion than of communalism where a community of believers not only has religious affiliation but also social, economic and political interests in common which may conflict with the corresponding interests of another community of believers sharing the same geographical space." (Kakar, 239-40)

The fear of appropriation by hegemonic majority religions is embedded in the collective psyche of every minority religious community. This fear cannot be explained away in rational terms. Appropriation refers to the wholehearted acceptance and assimilation of the faith articulations, religious symbols and sacred figures of another religion into one's own religious frame and sacred pantheon. It may appear a magnanimous gesture of recognition of the other, but in reality it can imply the annihilation of other religions into non-existence, instilling a fear in their followers. Vedic Hinduism has an inherent capacity to easily absorb alien religions, and it naturally instils fear in other religious traditions, especially the minority ones. "To be swamped by the surrounding Hindu culture has been historically the greatest fear of the Indian Muslim" (Kakar, 251). The fear is increased when the Hindu nationalists (*Hindutvavadis*) ask minority communities to renounce their cultural identity and to conform. It is this fear of assimilation that forces minorities to seek shelter under 'minority rights', or in extreme cases, under religious fundamentalism or fanaticism. The right to equality also implies the equal right of communities to be different.

When does the community dimension of religious identity become 'communal' (in the pejorative sense) is a crucial question. The quest

for cultural identity crosses a threshold when the 'we-ness' becomes narrowly exclusive and intolerant of all those outside the boundaries of the group. Amartya Sen gives us some valuable insights: "Identity can be a source of richness and warmth as well as of violence and terror, and it would make little sense to treat identity as a general evil", says he (Sen, 4). "A person's religion need not be his or her all-encompassing and exclusive identity" (Sen, 14), and religion seems to breed violence when it is affirmed as the sole base of identity suppressing all other identities of people. "Our religious or civilisational identity may well be very important, but it is one membership among many. The question we have to ask is not whether Islam (or Hinduism or Christianity) is a peace-loving religion or a combative one, but how a religious Muslim (or Hindu or Christian) may combine his or her religious beliefs or practices with other features of personal identity and other commitments and values (such as attitude to peace and war" (Sen, 66-67). It is not religion as such that perpetuates violence; instead, it is the tendency to define people by their religion alone to the exclusion of all other identities.

5. Religion as Resource in Conflict Resolution

The view that religions necessarily lead to conflict and violence is as one-sided as the view that religions invariably contribute to peace and harmony. Though religion is widely seen as an instrument of division and conflict, it is intimately related to its equally impressive power as a contributor to peace and well-being. Religious conflict, by its very nature, is conflict between religious communities with all the accompanying complexity, and hence needs to be comprehended and responded to at multiple levels including the socio-political and the cultural. Without in any way undermining the crucial role of the state machinery and the civil society I would like to emphasise the religious and theological resources that are available for this task.

a) Orientation to Forgiveness and Reconciliation

The treasury of fundamental moral virtues (truth, justice, love, compassion, forgiveness, etc.) that religions uphold is a valuable resource, although often overlooked by a secularist mindset. Forgiveness and reconciliation particularly stand out; this is strong in

the Judeo-Christian and Islamic worldviews. Unfortunately it is utilized effectively only at the personal or the interpersonal level, and rarely reaches out to the public domain where most of the religion-based conflicts occur. The Christian moral tradition understood forgiveness and reconciliation primarily as involving an individual or a party in relation to God, and aimed at re-establishing that broken relationship. Obviously this conception is too narrow to do justice to conflicts and enmity between religious communities. Recent developments in theology and scriptural studies emphasise the relational and communitarian dimensions of reconciliation. and makes it a rich resource with immense potential. Acknowledging that conflict situations involve unequal power relations it shows reconciliation a not only involving the offer of forgiveness, but also its acceptance and response in terms of owning up responsibility for the deed and readiness to transform the power-relations. "Here forgiveness and reconciliation become a political act", observes Arokiasamy. (193) To make reconciliation work at the political sphere we need to develop appropriate mechanisms, freeing it from the narrow confines of the confessional or the prayer hall.

Nation-states usually look at situations of conflict, whether religious or not, as primarily law and order problems, and so resort to criminal procedures relying on the principle of *retributive* (punitive) *justice*. Human societies have not gone much beyond the *'lex talionis'* which demands an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Religious resources make a shift possible from retributive justice to a perspective of *restorative justice*. South Africa has been a valuable laboratory of such an experiment. The Anglican Archbishop and Nobel Peace winner Desmond Tutu, who steered The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, reminds us of the insufficiency of retributive justice, the main aim of which is punishment of the guilty. Instead he affirms the centrality of restorative justice drawing from the African religious tradition of *ubuntu*; the core concern here is "the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he has injured by his offence" (Tutu, 54). Here

justice is not sacrificed, rather is affirmed in its fuller sense. The achievement of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission underscores the tremendous potential of political reconciliation in the complex world of today. That December 16 has been declared the Day of Reconciliation in that country is also a potent gesture.

The Indic religious traditions base their thinking on a different worldview that is built around the law of karma taking care of punishment and reward. Yet there are enough religious resources within them to facilitate peaceful coexistence of diverse religious traditions and to resolve conflicts. We need to explore them to make their potential operational. Mishra argues that the concept of tolerance, plurality and peaceful coexistence, along with the idea of social healing is inherent in the Hindu tradition. He does it with the help of textual evidence from the scriptures centred around the concept of *dharma* based on the Mahabharata of Vyasa. *Dharma* is the key to avert conflict, disharmony and sorrow (Mishra, 77ff). Yogasutra of Patanjali mentions the five great vows: non-violence, truth, non-stealing, control of senses, and non-acquisition. The Buddha gives 8 values/traits that point to Dharma: compassion for all creatures, forgiveness, abstinence from ill-will for others, purity, abstinence from extremes, good will for all, charity, and non-covetousness. The Panch-shila vows of a Buddhist monk is an undertaking to practice the five yamas. Non-violence or ahimsa means absence of oppression towards all beings in all respects and at all times. Gandhi built his non-violent weapon of *satyagraha* on the *yamas* and *niyamas* that articulate *dharma*. In his own words: "*Satyagraha* is a method of carrying conviction and of converting by an appeal to reason and to the sympathetic cord in human beings. It relies upon the ultimate good in every human being, no matter how debased he may be for the time being." (Gandhiji. CWMG Vol.45, 222). It is sad that free-India chose to ignore these resources in the task of nation-building, obsessed as it was with a secularist ideal.

The question before us is: Is it not right to expect a secular state to incorporate these ideals and values, so deeply ingrained in our religio-cultural ethos, into the functioning of our political life, without fear of being branded 'communal' and fundamentalist? Gandhi's attempt at integrating the private and the public spheres through *satyagraha* is

an insightful pointer. In the last part of his autobiography he wrote: "To see the universal and all-pervading Spirit of Truth face to face one must be able to love the meanest of creation as oneself. And a man who aspires after that cannot afford to keep out of any field of life. That is why my devotion to Truth has drawn me into the field of politics; and I can say without the slightest hesitation, and yet in all humility, that those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means." (Autobiography, 420.)

b) *Dialogue Orientation of Religions*

A distinctive feature of the traditional heritage of religions that has assumed significance in the 20th century has been the yearning for dialogue. It indicates, in spite of the past history of conflict and confrontation, the quest to move beyond one's religious boundaries, and to learn about the 'other' and from the 'other'. 'Intolerance' that is often associated with religion tends to evaporate in a process of dialogical encounter. Every world religion - Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikkhism, etc. - has been part of this great awakening, although the process of change will naturally be slow. The goal is not merely a tolerance *of* religions, but a tolerance that *is* religious, as Nandy points out (Nandy, 91). He argues that Asoka based his tolerance on Buddhist religious tradition, not on secularism; Akbar derived his tolerance not from secularism but from Islam; Gandhi derived his religious tolerance from Hinduism, not from secular politics.

The proponents of inter-religious dialogue speak of the 'four-fold dialogue': the dialogue of life, where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their human problems and preoccupations; the dialogue of action, in which people collaborate for integral development and liberation of people; the dialogue of religious experience, where people of different religious traditions share their spiritual riches and ways of striving for the divine; and finally, dialogue of theological exchange, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritage, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values. The Christian churches and denominations that had been at war for centuries have taken bold steps to enter into dialogue among them through what is known as

ecumenism. Vat. II of the Catholic Church has provided a vision of the 'religious Other', which has been the inspiration for many Inter-religious Dialogue programmes and Dialogue Centres during the past few decades. The transition from the image of the infidel who has to be converted at any cost is giving way to a respectful acknowledgement of the 'religious Other', supported by a new theology of evangelisation. The growing conviction that all are co-pilgrims creates space for people of all religions to live together, to understand one another, and to search together.

One critique about the present mode of dialogue is its preoccupation with 'similarities' rather than 'difference'. Similarities and commonalities are capable of creating a very narrow space that can be shared in common. Creative search and bold discoveries will be made only in entering the forest of difference. Interreligious dialogue will be able to shoulder this task only if it recognizes fundamentalists and atheists as esteemed dialogue partners, and consciously engages in dialogical encounter with secular ideologies. Recognition of differences may lead to the discovery of a common space that would inspire and invite them in a collaborative commitment for human well being.

c) Religions and struggles for justice and human rights

One cannot be blind today to the radical social changes in different parts of the world spurred by the ideals provided by religions. With the collapse of the erstwhile USSR there is a better awareness that social change does not consist only in the transformation of economic and political structures, since these structures themselves are regulated by deeper values and attitudes. The task of changing these values and attitudes would fall within the socio-cultural sphere religions are committed to.

Examples of social intervention on behalf of the underprivileged include the following: action to end discrimination against people based on colour, caste, race, gender or ethnicity; action against growing poverty and hunger; action to ensure human rights, or rather, rights of peoples; action against unscrupulous exploitation of the environment and the natural resources; and, action on behalf of the new marginalized in a fast globalizing world, including the refugees and the displaced.

the migrant labour and the slum dwellers. Such struggles bring together not only people who profess religious faith, but also those who adhere to diverse ideologies. The question 'why should one suffer for a stranger?' is not easily answered by secular ideologies. The notion of *expiatory suffering*, a foundational religious principle, helps to explain the phenomenon of committed men and women joining struggles for justice and dignity, willing to sacrifice their life for the 'Others'. The prophetic tradition that is particularly strong in the Semitic religions act as a powerhouse that is capable of challenging structures of injustice, division and hatred, as the story of Latin American Liberation Theology illustrates well.

The institution of prophetism in religious traditions can be a two-edged sword, let us not forget. Monotheistic religions are concerned with the creation of a just world, a paradise on earth. Prophetism may provide them with a certitude and an accompanying commitment to change the world and society. This certainty comes from the conviction that they are acting in accordance with the will of God. This may be exploited by fundamentalists and fanatics who often portray themselves as inspired by the prophetic zeal religion provides. Does prophetism make people intolerant of difference, thus generating conflict and violence? A militant *jihadi* may claim to be prophetic. A Christian missionary who is attacked may look at it as the inevitable outcome of his and prophetic commitment. Yes, prophetism is a two-edged sword with possibility of misinterpretation and misuse, and so needs to be approached with utmost care.

6. Conclusion

Religion is an ambivalent social reality in the sense that it can be a source of cohesion or an instrument of division. We based our discussion on the conviction that conflict between religions has to be addressed from a platform that gives due recognition to the complex reality of religion in human lives. The secularist approach has been hardly helpful either in grasping the problem or in dealing with it. We tried to look at religion-based conflict from three different angles: socio-political, theological, and cultural identity-related, and saw that there are adequate resources within religions themselves to be utilized; this in no way undermines the role of agencies like the state and

various civic bodies. It is mainly the task of religious functionaries to unearth the hidden potential within these traditions and transform it as effective tools in making the world a more liveable place for all.

Every segment of today's world is neatly fragmented to suit the multiplicity of disciplines and professions to the extent of losing an all-encompassing vision. Such compartmentalisation leaves little space as common space for religions to interact, to learn from each other, and even to challenge each other with an open mind. It may be noted that many secular countries have a ministry of religious affairs or its equivalent oriented to the creation of such a space. In India we have only a 'minority commission', with the danger of the label of 'minority appeasement' attached to anything the state does in relation to minority communities. Narrow secularist mindset tends to create an *empty space* that is devoid of anything religious. What in fact the world requires is a *common space* where every religion can exist fearlessly and encounter in freedom and contribute to the affairs of civil society.

This would require a paradigm shift in our political thinking too. The political sphere needs to outgrow its narrow mindset which says 'religion is the root cause of all conflict', or that 'religion is a nuisance to be kept out of public life'. The non-threatening common space that is both secular and religious can bring together people of all hues, and pool their resources in enabling peoples and communities to transcend their boundaries. How to create such a space, is the crucial question before us. Some concrete suggestions may facilitate our common search. (i) We need to begin with the socialization of our young, incorporating study of the basic tenets of every religion within the academic syllabus, and introducing the liberative potential of every religion in our schools and colleges. (ii) The media could play a pivotal role in the creation of a common space by promoting open discussion and fostering the noble values in each tradition, avoiding inflammatory rhetoric in their news coverage, especially their editorials. Only a mindset that respects difference, yet is open for encounter and for collaborative action can show us the way ahead.

Jesuit Regional Theologate
Sameeksha
Kalady - 683574

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Secular Perspectives are Significant

Sanal Mohan

Religion is an important field of study today where we find spe-
cialists in various disciplines interact. It is more so in the Indian con-
text as there is a renewed interest in the study of religions and reli-
gious cultures particularly in the context of the ongoing debates on
secularism. It is in this context that this short response to the paper
'Religion, Conflict and Conflict Resolution- Sociological Perspectives'
by Dr. P.T. Mathew is presented. The author has rightly pointed out
that we have reached a point where 'religion can longer be ignored
as a vanishing myth or an insignificant nuisance'. This is precisely the
reason why I consider religion as important. I think those who take
secular position on religion and religion-based conflicts will also agree
to this point although the author is quite skeptical of the position of the
secularists on such questions.

Religion effective?

Although the author refers to the connection between politics and
religion quoting Mahatma Gandhi's normative association with politics
and religion from a different ethical perspective, in the contemporary
religious politics hardly we find any ethical concern. As a result of it
although the paper is concerned with religion as understood and
practiced by religious communities 'of men and women of faith', it
seems to neglect the issue of politics that is built into the contemporary
struggle for power which is referred to as religious conflict. If one
goes into the anatomy of many of the religious conflicts in India in the
last one decade the unscrupulous game for political power becomes
visible. This is a point to which Dr. Mathew also agrees when he says
that religions could also breed conflicts. The sociological significance
of religion for example in the Indian context is a point well recognized

in the practice of social sciences today. I do not think there is any serious conflict on this issue between the secularist scholars and others. Even if there are any, it is important that the secular social sciences in India recognize the significance of religion.

There is space for doubt when the author says that conflict is some thing like a low intensity phenomenon whereas violence is something which is undesirable or harmful. There are problems, I fear, when this particular idea is brought in to analyze acts of violence, riots or pogroms. This is more so because in the last few years in India we could not make any meaningful distinction between different forms of conflicts the nature of which went on changing so rapidly. The author's argument that in the context of the religious conflicts it is possible to mobilize the resources of the religion itself to resolve the conflicts deserves attention although in the contemporary India we do not come across empirical examples to prove it. But as an idea it deserves attention. Having said this, it is important to mention how Dr. Mathew considers secularist discourses of today. While I agree with the fact that there are deficiencies in the arguments of the secularist scholarship in identifying religion as the root cause of violence, it is equally important that we listen to the secular arguments particularly in the need to have a dialogical society where one could think of moving beyond the closures that are effectively created in the public sphere. I think it is necessary to ask different set of questions to foreground the need of secularism. The inadequacy of the historical argument is clear enough. The need for a secular social and political life can't be pinned to the absence or presence of secularism in the past, but it should be built on a different set of ethical concerns which should be modern and contemporary. I think none of the empires or kings of the past required the secular principles as we need them today precisely because of the religious conflicts and pogroms to which Dr. Mathew himself has drawn our attention. It is in this context that we need to have a different ethical concern on questions of citizenship and democracy. These are points where the secularists and the religious could engage in a dialogue. The secularist arguments need to be liberated from economism that is narrow in the analysis of social issues.

Secular discourse is vital

The socio-political factors behind religious conflicts would show how little religion is there in many of the conflicts. The community rights are to be viewed from the side of the oppressed to get vantage point in the social analysis. This is true for any politics that grows from the concerns of social identities. It appears that some of the identities could become oppressive unless it is rooted in a notion of liberative politics. It is important to mobilize the resources of religion to resolve the conflicts although it is currently used at personal levels only. What we need is the possibility of expanding the reach of such a perception that would make larger reconciliation possible. This is some thing to which I do not think the secular opinion will have any objection. There is a further meeting ground when the issues of justice is taken up. But I disagree with the author when he argues that non-religious people would be dumb when they face the question 'why should one suffer for a stranger?' Such foundational questions can emerge from a people who are not empty and I do not think that the secularists are empty.

The fundamental issue here is to break a new ground where people of different ideological persuasions could enter into a dialogical relationship to find out ways of resolving the conflicts in which I feel both secularists as well as religious are active dialogue partners.

School of Social Sciences
Mahatma Gandhi University
Kottayam - 686041

Religions for Peace

George Karakunnel

Religions have been associated with conflicts of different degrees and categories. Present-day experience gives enough evidence to this. One does not need to go far for examples. Babri Masjid, Godhra, Marad and many other instances in India are reminders of what is taking place at a global scale.

I would like to focus my brief reflection on the question of relation between religion and violent conflict from the point of view of the nature of religion and raise the following question: Is there something intrinsic to religion that would cause violent outburst from its adherents? Dr P. T. Mathew's paper has underlined the paradoxical nature of religion, which speaks about positive and negative aspects involved in it. "Functions" of religion, as Mathew has explained, are accompanied by "dysfunctions". On the one hand religion brings about social cohesion, on the other hand it might bring about division and conflict leading even to violence. According to Mathew's paper it is the environment or context that determines the way a religion behaves. The paper highlights the nature of religious identity, which leads to tensions between communities. But is violence something intrinsic to religion? I think we need to go deeply into this question.

Conflicts, intrinsic to religion?

There are psychologists who hold the view that human beings by nature are aggressive. Freud saw aggression as fundamental to human nature. The old saying in Latin, *homo homini lupus* enshrines this view. Though many psychologists have supported this view, many others have also opposed it. Eric Fromm sees aggression not as innate but as reactive. There are psychologists like J. B. Watson and B. F. Skinner who hold the theory that aggression is the result of cultural

conditioning. Scientists dealing with genome project have pointed out genes as influential for human behaviour. But it has been recognized that genes are not the only factors that determine human behaviour. Genes interact with several other factors, which also are decisive in shaping the behavioural patterns of individuals and communities.

The paper by Dr P. T. Mathew looks at violent conflicts from the point of social science.

Social science could account for the underlying motives behind many violent outbursts in which religions are also very often implicated. Manipulation of religious sentiments, which are associated with the identity of a community often gives rise to violent reactions. The gain, which is here aimed at, is political. Mathew's paper has shown how socio-political factors work behind what is apparently religious conflicts. As the paper shows, cultural identity is another factor behind inter-religious conflicts. The phenomenon of violence is also related to economic motives. Many violent conflicts are associated with craving for wealth and power. If these observations are right, the sources of conflict cannot be in religions themselves. At least the entire burden cannot be put on religions.

In looking for the origins of conflicts and their resolution theological factors are important, as Mathew has shown in his paper. Theological discourse today in our pluralistic society should assume tones, which are helpful to build up interpersonal relationships between peoples of different religious communities. Identity to some extent is opposed to the otherness of the other and this creates an exclusivism, which develops into intolerance. Can we foster identity-claim without allowing ourselves to be intolerant?

I think religions need to develop a new self-identity. No religious identity should destroy our common human identity. The resources of religion should be helpful to discover our common identity. All religions invariably possess resources to resolve conflicts. Violent conflict is not intrinsic to religion. To a great extent religion is what people make of it. Today in the context of our terrorized world there is the need to discover the goodness in every religion. For this dialogue is very important.

Identity-consciousness, exclusive?

Dialogue is already gaining momentum among the religions of the world. We need to foster dialogue through study and common pursuits, which will be helpful for creating mutual understanding and harmony. Real encounter in dialogue will promote fellowship. It is a pity that there is a no possibility in our academic centres to promote serious study of the religious phenomena. A linking of religion with academy and society can help to build up better relations among people of various communities.

The fact that religion creates a sense of belonging and gives identity to people forming them into a community can be seen as a positive thing. The identity of a particular community could be open to other communities, which are established by different religious convictions. In other words a particular community's identity should not hinder fellowship of human beings in the larger world. Openness rather than exclusivism can be seen as the mark of true religion. The idea of diversity and communion is in fact a major theological thrust in Christian theology. Hindu religion and philosophy are also established on the principle of unity in diversity. Seen in this perspective, individual identities of religious communities not only need not oppose communion but also can be a very rich source for communion.

Re-interpreting religion

Looking at religion in the context of search for a harmonious world we need to emphasize the importance of reinterpretation. The role of theology is to do this work of reinterpretation: reinterpretation of Scriptures, of principles established by tradition, of customs and practices of communities. The most important area where reinterpretation is required is Holy Scriptures, which are the foundational realities for each religion. Religious fanaticism and fundamentalism are often legitimised by invoking the support of Holy Scriptures. There is no doubt that, in its work of reinterpretation, theology should take an inter-disciplinary approach. The findings of psychology, economics, sociology and several branches of knowledge can be useful in theologising. This has been recognized as part of the method of theology.

The following imperatives may be considered as emerging in the context of our reflection on "Religions for Peace": (i) Accept pluralism as a fact and as a blessing. Adherents of different religions should acknowledge each other and learn to respect each other. The belonging to a particular religious community and feeling of identity-consciousness should not become an obstacle to larger social communion (ii) Work for justice. Where there is tyranny there cannot be harmony and peace. Attending to the demands of justice is an important starting-point to overcome conflict. Religious communities themselves should become embodiments of the pursuit for justice. (iii) Develop a new hermeneutic of religious doctrines. Theology, especially an inter-religious theology, has to play a key role here. If theology is *fides quaerens intellectum,* faith searching for understanding in the context of the threatened existence of our human family calls for a new point of departure and a new way of journey on the path of faith which will allow the adherents of various religions to see the other not as rival but as co-pilgrims marching towards the shore of truth.

St Joseph's Pontifican Seminary
Alwaye - 683103

Comflict Transformation Approach

A. K. Ramakrishnan

This is a fairly comprehensive paper on the multi-layered and difficult subject of the linkage between religion and conflict and of the search for resources for transforming such conflicts. I should congratulate the author for achieving the goal of raising numerous relevant issues connected with the main topic. It is up to us to dwell deep into every single aspect.

The paper gives importance to questions of identity, including exclusivist claims of religions, communal identity to primordial identity. It suggests that "identity consciousness... may become a source of conflict with other groups, involving not only worldviews, but also emotional energy". The 'we'/ 'they' divide is also discussed particularly in the context of the construction of group identity. The question that bothers everybody including the author is the point at which a particular identity claim or assertion becomes hegemonic, exclusivist or threatening. In addressing this and in understanding identity construction in general, a discussion on the discursive processes of imagining and constructing the other and the linkage between such discourses and power seems to be in order. The self-assertion of communities involving the imagination of a simple other to the effacement of the other comes forth through a range of discursive protocols using myths and symbols and contemporary ideas. The other-making process could be discussed in their linkage with power so that the cultural construction of identities and their resultant conflict generation are further explained.

The paper suggests that the religious principle of 'expiatory suffering' explains why people commit themselves to struggles for justice and human dignity. It will not necessarily explain revolutionary commitment at different junctures and contexts in modern history to secular ideologies and practice. But such a principle does inform

commitment from believers. The most significant aspect of struggles for justice and human rights that the paper emphasises at the end can be supplemented with a human rights discourse that stress on questions of recognition, citizenship, civil society, state, and involving them all, questions of inclusive democracy.

The idea of 'common space' that the paper emphasises has tremendous relevance in constructing a democratic socio-political realm of human interaction. I wish to stress the author's point that "recognition of differences may lead to discovery of a common space" and thereby enhance the possibility of "collaborative commitment for human well being". In that vein, I agree with the overall multicultural perspective of the paper. Diverse religious as well as secular ideas that would not create a complete dichotomy between these two sets of beliefs can be treated as resources for our journey together for common endeavours.

Changing character of violence in our societies is a point that needs to be discussed while dealing with religion and conflict. While there is an overall increase in 'violence-prone areas' across the world and across societal levels, new forms of violence strike at the core of traditional societal security. In Marad I incident in Kerala, as against Marad II, we have seen those who live in the neighbourhood and interact with people of other communities involved in murder. Acquaintance, sharing of a social space, familiarity and proximity in themselves do not save one from extreme violence that in some way involves religious ideological exclusivism. This kind of atomisation that cuts across inter-communal bonds is one question that we have to ponder over, particularly in the Kerala context.

The paper quite rightly focuses on the dynamic nature of conflicts and it makes the necessary difference between violence and conflict. I think, instead of an approach that utilises a conflict resolution mode, where resolution would mean finality, a conflict transformation approach, where the dynamic character of conflicts can be captured, seems to be more useful. Further, the conflict resolution approach in certain cases would mean a willingness to sustain structural roots of conflicts.

School of International Relations
M.G.University, Kottayam - 686560

Awaken the Mystic,
Alert the Prophet in Religions

S. Painadath

P.T. Mathew, in his excellent study, examines the potential for conflict and the resources of conflict-resolution in religions from a sociological perspective. He analyses the phenomena of religions and the socio-political factors which shape the evolution of religion. He touches upon the theological substance of religions conducive to reconciliation. I would like to explore further the theological direction that he points out, and ask if there are inherent elements shaping the ambivalence of conflict and reconciliation in religions. The question that I would ask is this: how can we understand the conflictual tendency of religions and where do we discover the resources for harmony and reconciliation?

P.T. Mathew refers to the "treasury of fundamental moral virtues" at the core of religions. Hinduism advocates dharma, Buddhism upholds compassion. Christianity speaks of love, Islam preaches brotherhood. These are in fact not just moral values, but mystical perspectives on life. They offer the basic orientation of the particular religion to reality, both human and cosmic. If we pursue these insights we do find converging lines at the heart of all religions. Is there a meeting point at the very depth of introspection? We may not succeed in finding a common term acceptable to all religions to name it, but we can sense a point of convergence. It is basically the mystical sense of being human. The very fact that we humans can communicate deeply with one another – in spite of the divergences of languages – is ample proof for something that binds our hearts at a depth level.

Spirituality

From this perspective we may make a provisional distinction

between spirituality and religion. Spirituality is the experience of the Spirit. The term *Spirit* may not find resonance in all religious traditions. This term literally means breath, which is the term used in most classical languages to denote the presence of the life-giving divine energy, immanent and yet transcendent: *ruach* (Hebrew), *pneuma* (Greek) *atma* (Sanskrit) *avi* (Tamil) *chi* (Chinese). It is in breathing that we make the primal experience of our existential dependence on something beyond us. It is in breathing that we touch upon the limits of our life, the fragmentary character of our very being. At every moment we depend upon this stream of life-force (*jeevadhara*) which is not our own, yet becomes ours. It is within us, and yet beyond us. We are possessed by it, yet we do not possess it. The term *spirituality* could therefore be understood in the most primal sense, in its most universal significance. Spirituality is on the one hand the experience of our limitedness, and on the other hand that of our orientation to the Beyond. The term Spirit may be taken to denote the reality of the Beyond: the Absolute, the Ultimate, the Fullness, the Void, the Divine.

Spirituality is that which gives a sense of ultimate meaning to life. Spirituality is the awareness of the mystery of life. Spirituality is that which enables a person to say *yes* to life in spite of all uncertainties and ambiguities. Every person has some sense of spirituality, for no one would say, I need no meaning in my life. Spirituality is a universal experience that opens human consciousness beyond what is given, what is limited, what is ambiguous. Spirituality is a vision-and-way of life that evolves out of the perception of the depth dimension of life. At the level of spirituality every human person has an innate sense of what is good and what is evil. Spirituality unfolds itself as the inner divine voice through conscience. Spirituality manifests itself as the inner divine light, as the inner wisdom. Interpersonal communication is possible because at the deep level of spirituality there is something that binds us all together. It is out of this inner wellsprings that values of love and compassion, peace and harmony, emanate.

Religions

Spirituality finds expression through symbols. There are manifold forms of symbolic articulation: in art and literature, in ethics and politics,

in family and society. The most universal realm of the articulation of spirituality is religion. Religion is therefore the symbolic expression of spirituality. Religious forms try to give a format to the spiritual experience of a person or of a community. Art, literature, family ethics, social values etc. contribute to the religious format. There are basically four areas in which spirituality evolves into religion: creed, cult, code and community. In the formation of religion in all these four areas cultural factors and socio-political elements play a significant role because human life evolves from these realms. Symbols evolve out of culture. Hence cultural forces shape the formation of religious symbols. Geographical factors, political systems, economic interests, communal psyche and even language specificities determine the formation and transmission of symbols. In this process religion may even get alienated from the spiritual base and thus block the unfolding of the spirit instead of liberating it.

Consequently creed may get stagnated in barren dogmas, cult may end up in dry ritualism, code may adhere to blind legalism and community structures may tend to be oppressive. Here symbols lose their transparency and become idols. Instead of opening human consciousness to the Beyond, religion thus tends to subjugate it to the ego, personal or collective. Spiritual wellsprings get dried up and religion gives way to the forces of greed. Possessiveness poisons religious psyche. There are three evil forces which infiltrate into the sacred landscape of religions to cater to their vested interests: politicians intent on power, merchants aiming at monetary gain and fundamentalist preachers who manipulate religious faith to perpetuate their authority. All three agencies somehow misuse religious feelings of believers to amass for themselves power and wealth, privilege and authority. In a sense they all highjack religion to suit their needs and even to gratify their greed. The consequence is the politicisation and commercialisation of religion at the micro level as well as at a global level. Here religion is converted to a weapon to provoke communal conflicts and even to execute imperial agenda or ruthless terrorism. This phenomenon may be described as the eruption of the *demonic* on the landscape of religion.

What next? Is humanity helplessly sold out to such destructive forces? How does the divine Spirit react to this aberration? Does God come to the help of humans to restore spirituality, to reinstate *dharma*?

The breakthrough of the Divine takes place through two channels: the mystics and the prophets. In them and through them we discover the potential for peace and reconciliation on the religious landscape.

Mystical Critique

The term *mystic* points to the awareness of the *mystery* of the Divine. With a keen sensitivity to the unfathomable mystery of the Beyond mystics raise an abiding critique on every attempt to give name and form to the Divine. Mystics constantly challenge those who hold on to creed, cult, code and community structures to go beyond these forms in a relentless quest for the ineffable mystery of the Divine. "If you know God, it is not God!" (Augustine). The Divine is not something that we humans can easily objectify in order to raise it to a personal deity. Objectification is an inevitable process in the mind. We humans, in as much as we have a bodily and societal existence, do need personal images of the Divine for worship. However onto every image a true devotee will say *yes* and *no*. This is the call of the Upanishadic sages (*neti...neti*. Brih Up.) and of Christian mystics (*nada...nada*, John of the Cross) not this...not this! All names and forms of the Divine have to be relativised in terms of the transcendence towards the Absolute. Every religious symbol is relative, only the Divine is absolute. Every religion is a fragmentary perception of the mystery of the Divine.

When a religion tends to absolutise itself – declaring itself as the norm for all other religions – it declares itself equal to the Divine and thus stops being a true religion. Self-absolutisation is idolisation. This is the constant warning of mystics at the heart of every religion. Religions get into conflicts with each other when one or the other – or both – absolutises itself. Instead if believers of different religions confess that they are *co-pilgrims* in pursuit of the experience of the unfathomable mystery of the Divine, they share their perceptions with one another in all humility and truthfulness. This gives rise to a culture of harmony and reconciliation. This is the inspiration of the mystics.

Prophetic Protest

Prophet is the one who speaks out the Word of God. Prophets are moved by an intense experience of the Spirit 'to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant´ (Jer. 1,10). They are overwhelmed by an experience of the presence of the Divine that demands justice in all realms of life. For prophets a religious symbol has meaning only in so far as it expresses the divine depth of human relations, the divine call for human solidarity, the divine concern for the poor. Hence they criticise all forms of religious expression in relation to their primary motive: promotion of justice. They challenge all functionaries of religion holding on to creed, cult, code and community structures to make integral human liberation their main concern. In their view religious symbols, structures and rituals have meaning only in as much as they promote compassion, concern for the poor and solidarity with the marginalised.

When a religion isolates itself from the existential struggles of people, it stops being a true religion. Self-isolation of religion is a betrayal of the human. This is the constant protest of the prophets in all religions. Religions get into conflict with each other when one or the other – or both – isolates itself. Then communal interests of religions overpower wider human concerns and religion is misused for securing socio-political gains. Instead if believers of different religions understand themselves as *co-workers* in bringing about human welfare, they will work together for peace and justice, human welfare and eco-harmony. This gives rise to a culture of solidarity and reconciliation. This is the call of the prophets.

Inspiration of mystics and teachings of prophets are inherent resources available in religions to resolve conflicts.[1] In fact every major religion emerges as a mystical critique or/and prophetic protest. This twofold stream of the divine Spirit unfolds itself even today through living persons, movements and perspectives. The functionaries of religions need to have the humility to give space for these charisms to

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1   For a detailed study of this process: S.Painadath SJ, We are Co-pilgrims, Towards a Culture of Inter-religious Harmony, ISPCK, Delhi, 2006.

evolve in the community. Theologians need to have the courage to articulate the critique of the mystic and the protest of the prophet.

When religions open themselves to the humanising secular movements and ideologies there is a better scope for the mystic and the prophet to emerge. Conflicts can be resolved if there is a culture of genuine dialogue between religions, and between religions and secular cultural forms. The central concern in all this would be the integral liberation of the human together with the harmony of the eco-system.

Centre for Indian Spirituality
Sameeksha
Kalady - 683574

Christianity and Conflict:
An Investigation into the Potential for Conflict and Elements for its Resolution in Christianity

Jose Kuriedath

Jose Kuriedath, who holds a doctorate in sociology, now director of Jeevass Centre, Alwaye, makes a penetrating analysis of the ambiguities of religion in social formation. The inherent *associational* elements and *institutional* structure of Christianity tend to cater to the vested interests of power groups or persons in authority; this causes conflicts with other religious groups. However the pristine message of Jesus contained in the *meaning-giving* fabric of the Church has a divine potential for peace and harmony. Sages and theologians have a prophetic function in transforming the structures of Christianity and in making its message a potential for the resolution of social conflicts.

No serious student of history can deny that most religions, at several crucial turning points of history, have turned out to be divisive rather than a unifying force, even though many who are now engaged in ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue try to highlight the latter. Instances are available in abundance from the time of primitive religions up to the latest terrorist activities of Al-Quaeda, manifesting the conflict-generating nature of religions. And Christianity has been no exception, though at present the attention of the world community is not on it. It is in the context of the continuing conflicts in several parts of the world, generated in the name of religion by its followers, that this investigation is conducted. However, the enquiry of this paper is limited to Christianity.

The Structures of Religion

Society, as we know, is a complex network of several interdependent social systems which can be rather broadly categorized into two types: organizational systems and meaning systems. The

former have been developed by human beings in order to organize their manifold activities – economic, political, social, religious, educational etc. – into stable patterns, and the latter to impart the necessary perspectives, explanations, or meanings to those patterns. Religion, as a system, is in a peculiar position: it has organizational as well as meaning-imparting roles.

As an organizational system, religion gives shape and structure to human being's relationship with the superhuman power (or powers) that is called God(s) and to his/her relationship with fellow human beings in as much as the latter are conditioned by the former. It is commonly said that religion exercises this function through the well-known three C's: creed, cult and code. Even as these components of religion help us to organize a set of human relationships, they also inculcate in us certain fundamental life-perspectives that explain the overall organization of society. Thus religion becomes a meaning system as well.

An organizational system has two dimensions: institutional and associational. Social institutions are simply standardized and accepted modes of behaviour evolved by the society in order to obtain some determined goals and satisfy certain needs. But, such social institutions necessarily give rise to social associations since the former can survive only through the latter. It is associations that evolve, maintain and change social institutions to suit the varying needs of human beings. The religious associations we have today are too varied in nature to fit into any fixed type. They can be as bureaucratic and centralized as the Catholic Church or as traditional and non-centralized as the Hindu community. The organizational pattern of the associations varies partly due to the very nature of religions and partly due to historical reasons. For example, the semitic religions seem to have developed more authoritarian and monocratic structures than the Indian religions.[1]

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1   Max Weber. *The Sociology of Religion*, Boston. Beacon Press, 1964, p. 55. Weber distinguishes between ethical prophetism and exemplary prophetism. Even though the difference in the nature of structures and their flexibility is clearly distinguished by Weber through this categorization, the terms used by him seem to be rather inadequate since both concepts are not exclusive; some religions are both exemplary and ethical.

Similarly, religious associations that came under the influence of the western Roman tradition have become more bureaucratic (legal-rational) than the associations, even of the same religion, which until recently kept a certain degree of what Max Weber called "the unrationalized religiosity of the Orient".[2]

Now, applying these concepts to Christianity and regarding the potential of this religion for conflict, it may be asked: if Christianity has been a divisive force generating conflict in the human society, how far has it been so as a meaning system, as an institution and as an association? Even though the above three aspects of religion function inter-relatedly, it is important to bear in mind these conceptual distinctions in order to clearly understand the role of Christianity in producing conflict as well as resolving it.

Christian Church as an Association

Let us begin by answering the last query first. In order to understand clearly how far the Church as an association might have contributed to division, disorganization and conflict on account of its specific nature, the very concept of association itself needs to be explained a little more.

Associations are the outcome of lasting social relationships which a number of individuals develop through reciprocally oriented social actions. According to 'social action' theorists, social relationship is often characterized by conflict. Conflict occurs when power is exercised in action, i.e. when social action is intentionally oriented to carrying out the actor's will against the resistance of others.[3] Why do social actions often tend to exercise power and try to control others? Whatever be theological understanding of the human nature, sociologically speaking, the self-interested human beings simply have no other way than the exercise of power to control others if they want to enhance the satisfaction of their interests by obtaining the

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2   J.C. Alexander, *The Classical Attempt at Theoretical Synthesis*: Max Weber, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, p. 93

3   Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. by G. Roth and C. Wittich, N.Y., Bedminister Press, 1968, p. 53

scarce resources in society. 'Resources' mean not just material things alone, but material or non-material goals that will satisfy the manifold interests of human beings. Thus there are material interests like wealth, social position, and power, and value interests like attainment of religious and spiritual goals. As long as such resources are not freely available to all (even many of the spiritual resources are scarce, since the conditions on which their availability depends are not free), people tend to control others in order to prevent them from attaining these scarce resources so that their own opportunities are not reduced and to obtain them for themselves in order to satisfy their own interests.

Every association, therefore, is the embodiment of man's collective striving for the satisfaction of some interests. If the interests of a number of associations happen to be the same, conflict becomes unavoidable, since no association can succeed in achieving its goals without exercising power with reference to other similarly placed associations. For, from a 'conflict' point of view, one cannot obtain the resources that are scarce, without controlling others. This – the element of power in social action – is the primary source of conflict in religious associations too, because they too are associations. Over and above this natural tendency of associations to become conflict-generative, the superimposition and coalescence of additional interests in the course of history may and do reinforce the tendency and aggravate the divisive impact. If two religious groups are active in the same place and at the same time, conflict emerges because their religious interests themselves collide; besides, other types of interests are superimposed in the course of time.

Let me illustrate this with an example of conflict between Christianity and Islam in the West in the era of crusades. Both the Church and the Muslims had, besides the religious goals, several vested political, economic and status interests in trying to obtain control over the areas of the Middle East, which both religious groups claimed to be holy for them. Firstly, both were prophetic religions with universal proselytising mission. Islam in addition claimed that it is an integral way of life rather than a religion in the usual sense of the term and thereby advanced a religious justification for its political interests. From the part of the Christians, a complex set of such motives as the papal

desire to recapture the Holy Land and to reunite the Eastern and Western parts of the Christendom, the political need of the West Europeans to wrest control of the Western as well as Eastern Mediterranean area from the Moslems, the love of adventure among the rugged knights of Europe and their lust for land – all these made the clashes fierce and determined.[4] The claims for the monopoly of spiritual resources for the whole humankind together with the above noted non-religious interests could not be settled without repeated wars for a long period. West Asia and Southern Europe finally heaved a sigh of relief only when one group established its dominance to such an extent that the other was either wiped out or was forced to give up its missionary efforts and maintain a low profile conceding the dominant role to the other.

Another example from the history of the Hindu and Christian communities in North India is the occasional violence against Christians and their institutions, particularly in recent times after the Hindu revivalism has gained momentum. One of the essential interests of both Hinduism and Christianity is to maintain and, if possible, enhance the number of the followers of the respective religious traditions. Besides, for the Hindus, religious adherence is not essentially a matter of choice but an inalienable birthright; any attempt to interfere in that right is viewed with anger, since it is an attack on a Hindu tenet. The Hindu religion takes pride in being the eternal religion (*Sanatana Dharma*) that cannot let itself die out. On the other hand, Christianity is a proselytising religion that claims a fundamental right not merely to profess and practice the religion but also to propagate it. And the end-result of propagation is naturally the change of religious affiliation by the non-Christians. These strongly conflicting tendencies could have been softened to an extent by the exceptional capacity of Hinduism to absorb and assimilate any new religious ideas into its rather wide and varied theological spectrum. Unfortunately, as in the case of the previous example, several non-religious interests have been superimposed and made to coalesce with the religious ones.

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4   Thomas Bokenkotter. *A Concise History of the Catholic Church*. N.Y., Doubleday, 1979, pp. 164 ff.

Consider, for example, the Christian (particularly, of the non-Catholic groups) nostalgia for an era when they felt very secure since the masters of this country were Christians, their present economic backwardness and desire for upward mobility through education and institution-building and their anxiety about the survival and identity in a predominantly Hindu society. On the part of the Hindus, the longing to assert their numerical domination, their feeling of superiority on account of antiquity and indigenousness, the suspicion about the Christian community's Indian identity, their dislike of the latter's cultural distinctiveness, particularly in the North, which is seen as a hindrance to the total Indianization of the society and the dislike of the constitutional guarantee of minority rights. These multiple interests on both sides encourage and sometimes overwhelm the members to exercise power over each other. Each instance of this power play, including physical power manifested in violence, aggravates the situation and intensifies the divisive force as the victim of power wants to recapture his lost position while the agents of power try to consolidate or enhance the gained position.

Conflict within Christianity

The dynamics operating in inter-religious conflicts that we noted above can be found in the intra-religious conflicts too; and such conflicts are not rare within each religion. How do they begin? Almost all religious associations are charismatic in origin; they are formed as bands of a few loyal disciples devoted to some charismatic leader or founder who preaches a new religious message. Charisma, from a sociological point of view, is the endowment of supernatural, superhuman or at least specifically exceptional qualities in a person that attract and appeal to the interests of people who come into contact with the person.[5] The people who are attracted to the person become devoted to him and later join him as his disciples. At this stage, the personal charisma of the leader alone is the binding force that keeps the group together: such a control is accepted as legitimate by the devoted followers.

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5   Weber, *Economy and Society*, op. cit., pp. 218-220, 241-242.

But after the disappearance of the original charisma, there arises the need for a continued authority to keep the religious association united. It is then what is known as the routinization of charisma takes place. According to Max Weber, the social context which necessitates the routinization is the threat of disintegration, the charismatic domination faces as soon as it is exposed to the everyday demands of the normal times after the disappearance of the original charismatic leader. There arises a feeling of insecurity among the followers about the unstable nature of the charismatic domination. Besides, as the group grows in size, the functions of the group become differentiated both qualitatively and quantitatively, and as the original charisma has disappeared, it becomes difficult to exercise control personally and spontaneously over the enlarged and differentiated group. So the group feels the need for the habitual manifestation of charisma for the continued activation of the community, even when charisma is not spontaneously forthcoming. The only way this need can be securely fulfilled is to let the charisma manifest and be distributed according to some fixed procedures.[6] One who goes through certain established procedures and takes over the office is considered to have received charisma. Thus the spontaneous appearance of charisma is replaced by a systematic manifestation of routinised charisma. The institutionalized procedures are at first accepted on the strength of tradition. Later on, rationally systematized rules are legally laid down; a rationally oriented officialdom is also organized. Thus finally a rationally and legally legitimized bureaucratic authority comes into existence.

But, the process of routinization is not as harmonious as it appears to be. Group interests play a significant role in shaping the emerging structure. Max Weber has found that economic and status interests are the most prominent among them, even though non-material or spiritual interests may also exercise influence.[7] Both collective goals

6   Reinhard Bendix, Max Weber: *An Intellectual Portrait*, N.Y., Anchor, 1962, p. 305

7   Weber, *Economy and Society*, p. 254. Also see S.M. Eisenstadt, (ed.), Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1968, pp. ix-lvi

and group interests manage to coexist in the structure in the beginning; but, slowly the latter begin to replace the common interests. Emergence of interest groups within or together with the positions of power reinforces and concentrates power in a few positions, enhancing the vertical stratification of the organization and increasing the marginalization of those who have no power. Naturally this awakens and fosters the interest of the 'have-nots' to gain power. These interests are given expression to in the form of new values and norms. The emergence of such interests and values causes conflict and tension between the power-holders and the subordinates. Consequently, the legitimacy of the existing order is challenged; polarisation and even confrontation between those who hold old values and those who advocate new values take place. The divisions within religious organizations and the formation of new sects or groups that follow such divisions can be explained in terms of the twin process of routinization and stratification. The tension finally gets resolved through the emergence of new patterns of authority which represent or accommodate the interests of those who challenged the existing authority. If the organization is highly bureaucratic, the tension and conflict may give rise to new charisma. As A. Etzioni remarks, "after long periods of routinization, especially of centralization and deterioration, an organization like a society needs a charismatic leader to revitalize it by introducing major innovations".[8] And this charisma is viewed as the effect of 'the discontent-producing constellation of the organization'.[9]

From this perspective, the conflicts and the consequent divisions in a religious organization are not accidental but the gradual outcome of a social process. They are not completely destructive either; but are productive of vitality since the conflict and the consequent emergence of new charisma prevent the ossification of the social system by exerting pressure for innovation and creativity.[10] Otto

8   A. Etzioni, *A Comparative Analysis of Complex Organization*, N.Y., Free Press, 1961, p. 228

9   W. Stark, *The Sociology of Religion: A Study of Christendom*, N.Y., Fordham University, 1967, p. 46.

10   L. Coser, 'Social Conflict and the Theory of Social Change', *Social Change*, ed. by A. Etzioni, and E. Etzioni-Halevy. N.Y., Basic Books, 1973, p. 114

Maduro, in his book *Religion and Social Conflicts*, speaks about this process in the following words:

The positioning of a body of functionaries specifically charged with satisfying the religious interests of certain social groups by the production of a certain type of teachings and practices – or more briefly, the specialization of religious work – issues from a conflict process..... In this struggle, the emergent group interested in monopolizing religious production will have a tendency to dispossess the community of its means of religious production.... If this dispossession or expropriation does not succeed in overcoming the resistance of the community concerned, the result of the struggle can range from the elimination of the emergent group to its survival as a minority religious sect within the community.[11]

Now, let me illustrate this second type of conflicts religion produces i.e., conflicts within a religious organization, with a few examples from the history of Christianity:

1. The Division of the St. Thomas Christian Community in Kerala

If one examines closely the events in the history of the St. Thomas Christian community in Kerala from the time of the arrival of the Portuguese in India up to the well-known Coonan Cross oath, it can clearly be seen that the division which occurred with the oath and which continues to exist to this day was the culmination of a protracted power tussle among the leaders of the two opposing groups. By the sixteenth century, the partly traditional and partly bureaucratic structure of the Church in India had developed sufficient room for the satisfaction of the power interests of its leaders through the offices of the archdeacon and the *yogam*. As long as those interests were not seriously threatened, the changes in worship, customs and even in organizational affiliation introduced by the Portuguese, however far reaching these might have been, did not create any serious danger of conflict even though there was widespread dislike and aversion to the changes. It may be recalled that the repeated interferences by the

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11   See Otto Maduro, *Religion and Social Conflicts*, N.Y., Orbis Books, 1979, pp. 89-90. See also Harry M. Johnson, *Sociology*, New Delhi, Allied Publishers, 1983, pp. 425 ff.

Portuguese in several aspects of religious life during the time of Mar Abraham, the last Chaldean bishop in Kerala, and even a systematic and sweeping 'reform' through the Synod of Diamper including a change in ecclesial affiliation and Episcopal leadership did not create any serious conflict or division in the community. But more than fifty years later, the same community rose against the foreigners and eventually broke up from them just when the power interests of the traditional leaders clashed with those of the usurpers. When Archbishop Garcia stripped the archdeacon of his powers once and for all and practically reduced the *yogam* to a mere consultative body, none could prevent the division. And the same kind of interests continued to hinder the reunion even when there were several chances for it later.[12]

The effects of the interplay of interests did not stop with the division of the Christian community into two; it was also the beginning of the disorganization of a Church that was stable and conservatively rigid for several centuries. Social disorganization is the process by which the influence of existing norms decreases among the constituents of a group, paving the way to the decline of group cohesion and the spread of consequent disunity.[13] In the case of the St. Thomas community, Rome intervened directly for the first time through the Congregation of Propagation of Faith. The Holy See appointed a new bishop under the direct control of Propaganda and the community was administratively divided into two. It came under two separate regimes. The authority of the St. Thomas Christian Church lost a great deal of its power with these two successive divisions; a 'deflation of power' occurred as the power domain was considerably reduced. The organization was forced to make substantial concessions in order to accommodate the new power centres.

2. The Separation of the Eastern Churches

Another example of how the interests of the leaders create conflict

12   See J. Kuriedath, *Authority in the Catholic Community in Kerala*, Bangalore, Dharmaram Publications, 1989, pp. 105-142.

13   Hugo Reading, *A Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, p. 67.

within a religious organization is the separation of the Eastern Churches from the Catholic Church. The simple fact that this division in the 11th century caused no significant change in the faith and worship styles of the concerned groups (the Catholic Church attributes no heresy on the part of these Churches, but only a schism), but only in their administrative structures, clearly indicates that it was not so much the spiritual interests as political and cultural factors and power interests that caused the schism. The autonomous growth of the Eastern Churches due to certain political and geographical reasons, especially their independent administrative style and the hold the emperors of the region had on these Churches could not but clash with the strong centralizing interests of the Popes and their political allies who lived in the Western part of the empire. Some seemingly innocuous differences on doctrinal formulas provided the spark for the eventual divisive fire.

3. The Church of England in Conflict

More or less similar was the case of the separation of the Church in England too. It had its origin much less from doctrinal differences than from the discontentment over personal problems of the leaders (particularly, the King of England), and the political and national interests of a country. That is probably why the Anglican Church, even after several changes later, is still closer to the Catholic Church in faith and cult than other non-Catholic churches of the West.

4. The Protestant Revolution

The dynamics of the Protestant revolution seems to be more complex. The immediate reason for Martin Luther's reaction and the Pope's concern might appear to be economic and political, camouflaged under the religious issue of indulgences. But it was much more than that. Luther really emerged as a charismatic leader who challenged the sweeping degeneration of the Western church. The displacement of the original spiritual values and ideals by the petty interests of the Popes and bishops had reached a level that was seriously detrimental to the very survival of the Church as a spiritual organization. Theological stagnation, the degeneration of theologization into an exercise to give an ideological cover-up to the material interests of the Church leaders, cultic practices bordering on superstitions,

authoritarianism and nepotism along with political interventions, commercialization of spiritual life etc., were only some of the symptoms of this critical situation. No wonder, Luther was hailed as a *reformer*. The emergence of the anti-institutional leadership and the ensuing division were, from a sociological point of view, a dialectical necessity to prevent the total disorganization of the Western Church; the manifestation of the charismatic potential of several leaders at the time of the conflict was an expression of the creative resilience the Church still possessed. It seems to be a classic case of disunity for the sake of reorganization. (Similar dynamics of social disorganization and reorganization can be found in the case of the reforms initiated by Buddhism and Jainism in the Hindu way of life). Both types of reforms caused counter reform initiatives in the parent organizations, namely the Catholic Church and Hinduism.

5. *Conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland*

This conflict that has lasted for several decades and is now gradually subsiding is an example of two denominations of Christianity fighting against each other not for any religious goals but for purely political ends. The Catholics in Northern Ireland want to join the Republic of Ireland as that would give them better identity and security, while the Protestants want to keep it as a part of the United Kingdom since that is the source of their political identity. While the Catholics have been experiencing discrimination in Northern Ireland for long, the Protestants fear that the same would be their situation if the unification of Ireland takes place. Again, we notice here the interplay of several non-religious interests coalescing with some religious sentiments.

Religion as an Institution and Conflict

As noted in the beginning, an institution is simply a standardized mode of behaviour. A religious institution is a set of accepted patterns of religious behaviour.[14] The second question that we posed in the beginning was whether religion as an institution, apart from being an association has had any divisive role in history. It must be conceded that it is extremely difficult to separate the institutional aspect of religion

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14   Ibid., p. 108

from the associational with regard to any given historical incident of conflict; we can make the distinction only for the sake of conceptual clarity. Even when we examined the divisive function (dysfunction?) of religion as an association, the conflict was shown to arise from certain ways of behaviour influenced by sectarian interests of the members. According to conflict theorists, almost all the institutions in the long run are manifestations of the ruling class interests. Hence the question, how to distinguish institutional factors from the associational, is a tricky one.

In every religion there is an aspect of 'given-ness' or there are elements that come from outside human sources, something beyond the human interests and goals or something that cannot be reduced to human endeavours. The Catholic Church which claims to have the fullness of these given elements in the form of revelation has conceded through Vatican II that other religions too have the 'rays of God's revelation'. In reality, of course, these elements are not translated into ways of behaviour without the active involvement of human responses and their interests that will seep into the responses. However, for analytical purpose, let us consider that they are received uncontaminated and examine their role in the unity and disunity, or organization and disorganization of the human society.

These given or revealed elements are expressed through the three important aspects of religion that I indicated in the beginning, namely, creed, cult and code. According to the official tenets of all world religions, there are irreducible differences in their creeds and cultic practices, the core elements of which are claimed to originate from the divine source itself. (The role of code will be discussed later). Can they or do they operate as divisive factors? If so, why?

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15   The concepts of election and exclusive revelation of God that the people of Israel claimed may have been the original source of many a conflict with other religions in the Judeo-Christian tradition. These concepts, as they were practiced, appear to have been influenced by the usual ethnocentric attitude that is found in most tribal societies and the ignorance of geography that limited their idea of world to the land surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. The holy wars waged by Israel against the nations and their gods, the hatred and antipathy practiced by them against the gentiles, the criticism of idolatry – all were

From a theological point of view, God cannot be the source of any division.[15] Hence some theologians tend to accept a gradation in the authenticity and fullness of these creed and cult elements in different religious traditions and attribute the divisive effect, if any, to the inadequate understanding and acceptance on the part of the others, of this objective gradation and theological convergence. Once the divisive role is thus shifted to the subjective side, it is comparatively easy to reduce it to the associational factors like interests, ignorance etc.

But, even objectively speaking and without having recourse to any concept of gradation, it can be stated that, from a sociological point of view, plurality of religious faiths and cults need not be a divisive factor, as the plurality of marriage customs, family types, political systems etc. are not so and do co-exist in society. Plurality in itself is not divisive; on the contrary, it can be unifying in the sense that it brings out the different aspects of a social phenomenon more clearly and elaborately, and helps the people to appreciate the total richness and varied dimensions of the phenomenon. Basically, it is the cultural diversity of man that accounts for the multiplicity of religious heritages; rays of God's revelation received in and by different cultural contexts shaped the formation of different religions. Like other cultural differences that are accepted with equal dignity and honour, religious faiths and cultic practices can be appreciated without generating conflict; the multiplicity of the rites (Churches *sui juris*) within the Catholic Church is an example of this type of non-divisive plurality, at least in theory.

But, the moment people fail to appreciate the richness in variety and begin to attribute to one or another religious tradition an exclusive and overriding claim for survival or propagation even through the exercise of control over the others, human interests come into the picture and begin their power-play. For, even the doctrines of uniqueness, universal mission, fullness of revelation etc. claimed by some religion including the Catholic Church, if such ideas are of

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claimed to have been approved by God due to the ethnocentric understanding of divine selection. .

divine origin, cannot demand the promotion of those claims by infringing on the freedom of conscience of others; in other words, the divine interest which seeks the unity and peace of all human beings can demand the propagation of his message only without exercising power over others and without creating conflicts in the society.[16] The use of power or control over others by curtailing or containing other people's freedom is definitely of human interest, not divine.

Potential for Unity

As Christianity itself teaches, God loves all and never wishes the destruction of some for the sake of others. The picture of God that Jesus presented before his followers is of a Father who loves both the elder and the younger sons equally, of a farmer who gives the same remuneration at the end of the day to those who came to work at different times, of a shepherd who treats the lost sheep and the ninety-nine equally. In the Kingdom of God that Jesus envisaged there is no inequality between the rich and the poor, the first and the last, the mighty and the weak, the male and the female. All are equal in dignity as the children of God. In order to establish this equal dignity, it would appear that God loves the weak and the poor more than the strong and the rich. Jesus showed this special concern of God for the poor and the weak through his special fellowship with the marginalized in society and his teachings that clearly indicated why God has a preferential option for the poor. Thus, Jesus through his words and deeds indicated that God is ready to demolish the divisions and bring about unity and peace in human society. Peace (*shalom*) was the identifying characteristic of the Kingdom of God. Thus the message of Jesus was totally opposed to any type of division in the society.

16   Though the question of the evolution of the idea of the uniqueness of Christianity and its universal mission of salvation may be examined elaborately from a historical point of view, I leave it here as a separate theological issue that must be discussed in full from a historico- theological point of view. A thorough examination of the teaching is urgent today, as followers of other religions have become very conscious of their identity and rich heritage. But, how openly and critically such an issue can be discussed is a thorny question, since it is already defined by the Church as a dogma. Even with such claims of uniqueness and universality, conflict need not arise if one under stands these claims properly.

Jesus taught the universality of God's love and salvation. In the light of Jesus' message, the uniqueness of Christianity does not consist in its exclusiveness as a religious system and the claim for superiority over other religions, rather in its capacity to transcend the categories of historically determined religious traditions and in its broad-based approach to all other religions through which it can teach the universal Fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of the humankind, where there is no kind of discrimination. Hence the first disciples of Jesus called themselves as followers of the 'way' and did not try for some time to become a distinct association or develop a separate institution. However, the later history shows that, ignoring the teachings of Jesus, the Church began to theologize the Judaic claims and treat other religions negatively for many centuries. It began with St. Paul, though he himself was an important instrument in helping the new movement transcend the Jewish boundaries. Paul speaks about the Gentiles as "offering sacrifices to demons and not God" (1 Cor 10:20-21) and brands the entire Gentile world as immersed in idolatry and immorality (Rom 1: 18-32). Paul characterized his parent religion as one displeasing to God and hostile to all humankind, filling up their quota of sins and bringing down the wrath of God upon it. (1 Thes 2: 14-16). By negatively assessing Judaism and positively shaping a distinct theological and institutional identity for Christianity, Paul laid the foundations for institutional Christianity. Many Fathers followed Paul and on the one hand treated other religions negatively and on the other completed the institutionalization of Christianity. Once fully institutionalized like Judaism, the claim of universality and exclusiveness became a source of division due to the Church's close association with the powerful Roman political system. The history of Christianity is a paradigm case of the influence of material as well as non-material institutional interests routinising the original charisma and transforming the 'way' into a Church.

We began this section examining the role of institutional Christianity in conflicts; however, towards the end, our analysis has brought us to the third aspect of religion, namely, religion as a meaning system. Besides insisting on stipulated behaviour patterns, religion imparts a specific vision about the various aspects of human life through its

creeds or doctrines. The vision that the divine revelation, irrespective of religious differences, provides regarding human relations is one of unity, love and peace. So, if human interpreters can detach themselves from the power-generating human interests and begin to live and spread the vision of unity and peace given by the divine revelation, it would function as the source or root of human unity. Since both associations and institutions are self-perpetuating, they have a drive for growth and permanence. Hence, they have to promote their vested interests, and are, therefore, unable to foster unity wholeheartedly. But, persons who have transcended such interests have been able to preach and promote unity beyond the borders of organizational religions. The gospel message of the Kingdom of God as preached by Jesus was a call for unity as children of God without the limitations of the religious borders. Christianity is presented in the Acts of the Apostles as the 'way', namely, as a way of life rather than a system like Judaism. The decision regarding circumcision and the Cornelius story, both described in the Acts, show the universal or transcendent nature of the new way of life. It was only later that those who responded to that call developed clear boundaries for their group and made it a clearly marked organization with distinct creed, cult and code. So, any discussion of the potential for the resolution of conflicts and promotion of unity by religions must start from a search for such a potential in charismatic persons who can rise above man-made boundaries, not just for purely institutional initiatives.

Religion and Value Conflicts

Till now, we have been discussing conflict-generating potential of religions as organizations. Towards the end of the last section we touched on the role of religion as a meaning system also. Some other aspects of this role of religion need further examination. As already noted, the role of the meaning system is to develop proper perspectives that will ensure the smooth functioning of the organizational system which in return translates these perspectives into concrete institutions. Of all the meaning systems, religion has been the most fundamental, influential and all-embracing.[17]

17   Even though the Marxist reductionism has tried to explain away all meaning systems as superstructures propped up by the economic system, few modern

The vision that a religion provides about human life is translated into practical life through religious values. And religious norms are the external and concrete guidelines for living such values, which religions want to inculcate in their followers. Internally through socialization and externally through the imposition of norms with sanctions, such values are transmitted and assimilated by people. In society, the primary function of values is social control, i.e., keeping the members of the society united through shared meaning of life and goals. Hence norms by nature are unifying, not divisive. But there are different kinds of norms, as there are different kinds of values which may be broadly grouped into two: primary values and secondary values. Primary values or core values are so fundamental and central to human life that they must be the same in any place and at any time. Justice, peace, love etc. in their generic form are primary values. At the level of these values, there is a sort of basic or fundamental unity among all religions. It is the secondary and other more peripheral values that often keep one set of religious followers distinct from the others. They are mostly the concretization of primary values into various given cultural situations. The differences in secondary and peripheral values also need not be conflict-generating or divisive, as in the case of creeds and cults (which we discussed above). Besides, in this age of ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue, many try to emphasise the commonality of values found in various religions rather than the differences. The Malayalam saying, that is said to have originated from Sree Narayana Guru, a twentieth century social reformer, captures beautifully this trend among some intellectuals: *'Mathamethaayalum manushyan nannayal mathi'*, which means that 'whatever be the religion, it is enough that the human being becomes a good person'.

All this does not mean that religious values do not divide humankind. They do. The secondary values often provide distorted or adulterated world-views on account of the interplay of human interests. In translating the primary values into concrete secondary values and

sociologists accept this analysis fully. In fact, Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism* is a bold attempt to turn Marx upside down and to prove the influence of meaning system on organizational systems.

norms, group interests begin to coalesce and exercise their power. The religious leaders who often have vested interests in perpetuating the economic, social and political interests of the dominant groups in the society, since they themselves belong to such groups, shape those values and norms, and cultivate a world-view that will safeguard their interests. In other words, they would reconstruct their religious experience and perceive its values in accord with the interests of their own classes.[18] A clergy in mutual identification with the dominant classes and indebted to them, will tend to exclude, disqualify and desacralize any teaching or practice, religious or not, that appears to be opposed to the interests of the dominant classes. Thus the religious leaders, sometimes even without knowing, become instruments in the restructuring of the religious system, which tends to create a silent consent to the established dominance and a simultaneous rejection of opposition to such dominance.[19] Here religion joins hands with some of the existing conflict groups in a society and reinforces the divisions by providing a justification or rationale that helps the dominant groups. Some examples of attempts at such restructuring will be illustrative: religious discourses couched in terms that are innocuous and foreign to the basic problems of a hierarchically stratified society, doctrines that accept and even defend the prevailing social divisions as something beyond questioning, teachings that deny the existence or importance of conflicts between the dominant and dominated classes, or pronouncements that question or even deny the legitimacy of a struggle against social divisions.[20] The teachings of the Church on various aspects of economic, social and political life from the time of Constantine through the Middle Ages, which justified and defended most of the then existing social divisions and stratifications like feudalism, monarchy etc. are good examples. Even though the primary value of justice in general is a beautiful ideal of life, justice as concretely interpreted in different parts of the world from time to time has been influenced by the dominant interests of society. Similarly, the primary

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18   O. Maduro, op. cit., p. 126

19   *Ibid.*

20   *Ibid.*, p. 127

value of equality is the foundation of human dignity; still, in translating this value into practice, most religions have perpetuated centuries-old gender discrimination. In such situations, religion, as the Marxists complain, becomes a tool to provide the ruling class ideology. Obviously, religion here becomes a force that reinforces and perpetuates the already existing divisions.

Unity through Conflict?

Religion has also been and still is a divisive force in another, much more constructive sense. As I mentioned above, values (secondary) and their normative applications undergo changes due to change in perceptions. (The primary values and norms seem to originate from a divine source beyond the influential field of human interests and hence transcend changes due to the changes in time and place). Change of values is never uniform or simultaneous in every stratum of society. Those who enjoy the benefits of the currently prevalent values will be reluctant to give up those values and accept new values. As kings and emperors were slow to accept the values of democracy, so the Brahmins were reluctant to imbibe the value of a casteless and egalitarian society. It is often through charismatic leaders that the old values are challenged and new values are presented. These charismatic leaders, and the religious group which follows them, usually articulate and call for the implementation of new and progressive values far ahead of the institutional leaders. This prophetic role of religion, although manifested only occasionally, can and does generate conflict in society. But this kind of conflict generates enough creative force also not only to reform the existing societal structure but even to heal the consequent division and disorganization. In other words, even though the process is anti-institutional and divisive, it is not unhealthy or detrimental: on the contrary, it is revitalizing. From the divisiveness emerges the creativeness of a new and progressive society. The conflicts and divisions the creative and prophetic interventions of the founders of important world religions have caused in the society fall in this category.

The impact of such types of conflicts often goes beyond the boundaries of religious organizations, and challenges the values

prevalent in the larger society too. The history of religion shows that religions have challenged the values and norms of society and called for a more just reorganization. The religion of Moses challenging the obscurantist and polytheistic beliefs around them, the early Christianity challenging the apotheosisation of the emperor, and Islam liberating the Arabs from unenlightened tribal beliefs and magical cults are some of the examples from religious history. These conflicts are creative. From such creative conflicts can emerge a higher level of unity and cohesion in a society. The fact that society has not been able to heal some of such divisions through its dialectical progress perhaps indicates the presence of purely human, sectarian interests also.

Conclusion

The above analysis, we believe, has brought out the divisive as well as reconciling potential of religion. It has also pointed out how closely the conflict-generating human interests and unifying divine interests function together in religions. Moreover, it was noted that the line which distinguishes the institution from the association and the superhuman elements from the human in the institutional structures of religion is very thin. That is probably why in the case of religions no division is totally divisive and no unity is fully unifying. Religions, being both divine and human in origin, have always been, and will always be, a force that unifies as well as divides, organizes as well as disorganizes the human society.

Jevass
St. Antony's CMI Monastery
Alwaye - 683101

Gandhi and the Conflict of Religions

Ignatius Jesudasan

Ignatius Jesudasan, who holds a doctorate in theology, teaches at Arulkadal, Chennai. Well acquainted with the writings of Mahatma Gandhi, he examines the stance of Gandhi on Hinduism and Christianity. Gandhiji could perceive deep spiritual bond of all religions, but could not sense the very origins of religions in ethnic conflicts. Gandhiji rightly points out that religion leads to conflicts when the religious metaphor of one religion is imposed on another community. The original inspiration of Jesus, according to Gandhi, is to respect the concrete way in which the Divine works in each human person and consequently to develop a culture of love.

Religions may be viewed in many different ways. One way is to see them as abstract beliefs and concrete practices of particular communities. Another way is to look upon religions in terms of what they do to the people who believe and practice them. The latter is an interestingly concrete and personal historical method. Gandhi tends to speak of religion on these terms. With him, I make a third way by combining the two methods to relate the beliefs and practices to the history of the societies into which the religion merged or emerged from its start on. Such a historical method implies that we cannot really separate religion from the society in which it lives and grows, or undergoes change in death or survival in another form.

Ethnic History-making Function of Religion

Religion has practically been the mythical-ritual storehouse of the ethno-historical and pre-historic memories, eventually written down in and venerated as divinely inspired scriptures. The latter report the respective community's ethnic past blended and metamorphosed into poetically metaphorical constructs for practical ethno-historical realization in the future. This was a distinct and anciently accepted subjective brand of future-oriented, but present-directive historical

narration. Living in a self-contained world, which was closed to other ethnic groups, they took the subjective versions of their narration to be the whole truth about their world. Therefore they tended to negate the other ethnic groups' lives and histories to be equally true and valuable to those ethnic groups. The later historical generations, which inherited the same tradition in their scriptures, have held to the same attitude of violent closure to and negation of the truth of other versions of human and socio-ethnic history.

Religion thus is the bond which has been holding every living society or culture together. In this sense religion includes much more than its institutional representatives and office-holding functionaries may care formally to recognize at any given time. The latter are usually late and hesitant to confer such recognition, and try to avoid it, unless and until it becomes circumstantially unavoidable. Any living religion may therefore hold its sway well beyond the boundaries known to or recognized by its institutional establishments. This would explain how and why new religions or ethnic group-consciousness keep on emerging by passing over the old societal forms, which resent, resist and fight the new emergence as their life-threatening pest.

Origin of Conflict within Religion

Conflict takes place because changes in religious beliefs or ideas mean also simultaneous changes in the structured power-relationships of the ethnic society in which the new ideas emerge as operative concepts or metaphors of a new societal equation. They introduce a disturbing imbalance in the law and order which holds that society together. Thus the history of every newly arrived religion becomes the conflict of an emerging social order with a longer-established, old-time socio-political order.

Though Gandhi was alive to such current socio-historical complexities, he did not envisage the past of religions in the same historical mould. Instead he spiritually idealized the past and applied two different criteria to interpret the past and the present. In this he may have been partly with the traditional representatives of the popularly established religion and society, who generally combine to take their stand against the new in favour of the old order. Gandhi is

therefore now with the old and now with the new. This stand left him without friends on both sides. The new has often to fight and struggle its way to its social acceptance and legitimization. This is how every ethnic group or identity has developed and grown to its present stature of whatever size or quality it has reached. As the readers of *Jeevadhara* are largely Indian Christians, I shall briefly illustrate my thesis with focal reference to Gandhi's Hinduism and biblical Christianity.

Gandhi's Exposure to Different Religions

The early exposure of Gandhi to different religions in native India would not surprise any knowledgeable person. Vaishnavite Hindus, Jains and Muslims lived side by side in his native Gujarat. Inter-religious discussions were common events in his father's house. Teenaged Gandhi's best boyfriend was a Muslim. The ruling ethno-religious pride of the nineteenth century England made his exposure to other faiths and to Christianity in South Africa readily understandable. But surprising is the amount of time he seems to have given to the study and reading of religious literature in the midst of his legal studies and politico-judicial engagements. The devoting of so much time to religious questions is surely indicative of the amount of social influence of zealous Christian friends and of Gandhi's own deep interest in and personal commitment to matters of faith and religion.

In his adult life, religion began historically to occupy his political attention and engagement. During the post World War I period, Gandhi unsuccessfully identified the Indian National Congress with the then current Islamic demand for the restoration of the Britain-abolished Turkish Sultanate. In the Hindu-Muslim riots, which followed the failure of this Khilafat movement and the eventual partition of India two decades later, Gandhi came face to face with the political fire, which religion could kindle. Finally he sacrificed his own life in the communal fire which was burning in the hearts of some Hindu nationalists.

There was a time in South Africa when Gandhi seriously asked himself which was the true faith, and thought of embracing Christianity. The gentle figure of Christ, so patient, kind, loving and full of non-retaliating forgiveness, struck him as a beautiful example of the perfect

man. But influenced by a learned and devout Jain diamond merchant he eventually came to the conclusion that there was nothing in the Christian scriptures that was not to be found in the Hindu scriptures, and that to be a good Hindu was also to be a good Christian.[1] This came as a surprise to the Christian friends who had got him interested in their religion. In his own words,

I came to the conclusion... after prayerful search and study and discussion with as many people as I could meet, that all religions were true, and also, that all had some error in them; and that whilst I hold by my own, I should hold all as dear as Hinduism.[2]

Equality of Religions and Needlessness of Conversions

To Gandhi, such equal love and respect for all religions meant not only the giving up of the desire to convert people from one religion to another, but also the positive entertaining of the wish and effort to make Hindus better Hindus, Christians better Christians and Muslims better Muslims. He assumed that better Hindus, better Muslims and better Christians would meet among themselves as better human beings. The inclusive definition of religion implied here was one of increased humanization. Gandhi therefore challenged the assumption of all missionary faiths about the possibility of only one true religion as radically false, because it led to social exclusions unless and until all were included under one dominant ethnic ideology. Such a singular ethnic ideology was inconsistent with toleration for all true faiths. A true faith for Gandhi was one the sum total of whose energies was for the good of its adherents. As such, no single faith could be wholly evil or false in itself or to its adherents, but only partially so, which implied the need and possibility for collective self-betterment by learning from others.[3] The partial evil in each faith was itself due to the ignorance of other faiths.

On such personal and experiential basis, Gandhi went on to recommend to all who wanted to be cultured, sympathetically to read

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1   Robert Ellsberg, ed. *Gandhi on Christianity* (Orbis Books: Maryknoll), 1991. p. 12, quoting from Mr. Gandhi: the Man, p. 20

2   *Gandhi on Christianity*, p. 57: from *Young India*, May 29, 1924

3   Ibid

the scriptures of the world religions. This was a condition for realizing equal respect between religions. One need not fear that the young would lose their own ethno-religious roots from such exposure to other scriptures. Rather it would liberalize their outlook on life and keep them open to study freely everything which was good and clean. This, according to Gandhi, was the right Sanatani Hindu attitude:

He is no Sanatani Hindu who is narrow, bigoted and considers evil to be good if it has the sanction of antiquity and is to be found in any Sanskrit book. I claim to be a Sanatani Hindu because, though I reject all that offends my moral sense, I find the Hindu scriptures to satisfy the needs of the soul. My respectful study of other religions has not abated my reverence for my faith in the Hindu scriptures. They have left their deep mark upon my understanding of the Hindu scriptures. They have broadened my view of life. They have enabled me to understand more clearly many an obscure passage in the Hindu scriptures.[4]

Was Gandhi a Christian in Secret?

Accused by some fellow Hindus of being a Christian Nicodemus, Gandhi answered it:

The charge of being a Christian in secret is not new. It is both a libel and a compliment – a libel because there are men who can believe me to be capable of being secretly anything, that is, for fear of being that openly. There is nothing in the world that would keep me from professing Christianity or any other faith, the moment I felt the truth of or the need for it. Where there is fear there is no religion. The charge is a compliment in that it is a reluctant acknowledgement of my capacity for appreciating the beauties of Christianity. Let me own this. If I could call myself a Christian or a Muslim with my own interpretation of the Bible or the Koran, I should not hesitate to call myself either. For then Hindu, Christian and Muslim would be synonymous terms. I do believe that in the other world there are neither Hindus nor Christians nor Muslims. There all are judged not according to their labels or professions but according to their actions

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4   *Young India*, September 2, 1926

irrespective of their professions. During our earthly existence there will always be these labels. I therefore prefer to retain the label of my forefathers so long as it does not cramp my growth and does not debar me from assimilating all that is good anywhere else.[5]

Is Eclecticism a social Virtue or an intellectual Vice?

Being accused by Christians, of eclecticism, Gandhi defended himself and Hinduism as broad-based in their faith, which opposes neither the Christians nor the Muslims. As based on the broadest possible toleration, Hinduism did not abuse a man even for his fanaticism, but tried to understand him from his own point of view. While Gandhi acknowledged such a stand as embarrassing to others, he did not find it embarrassing to himself. While asking people, therefore, to examine all religions from the point of view of those religionists themselves, he did not expect the India of his dream to become wholly Hindu, wholly Muslim or wholly Christian, but wholly tolerant of different faiths.[6]

Acknowledging the assumption of the missionary religions that their belief was true not only for themselves, but also for the whole world, he challenged it with what he assumed to be the greater truth, namely that God reaches us through millions of ways – indeed as many unique ways as there are individuals. In so far as the missionary religions neither understood nor subscribed to that belief, Gandhi faulted them with a lack of humility, which instinctively accepts human limitations versus the limitlessness of God's power. Gandhi intuited that in assuming and imparting human thought and knowledge as God's own, the Semitic religions had succumbed to collective ethno-spiritual pride.[7]

All Religions as Imperfect

Gandhi traced the imperfection of all religions to the state of human imperfection in our evolutionary historical time, with the possibility of falling back instead of constantly moving forward. Interpretations

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5   *Young India*, Sep.2, 1926

6   *Young India*, Dec. 22, 1927

7   *Young India*, March 22, 1928

would change with the evolution or revolution of the times. Which interpretation is to be held the right one? Gandhi answered it ambivalently. "Everybody is right from his own standpoint, but it is not impossible that everybody is wrong. Hence the necessity for tolerance, which does not mean indifference towards one's own faith, but a more intelligent love for it. Tolerance gives us spiritual insight ... far from fanaticism." Assuming imperfection as universal, Gandhi ruled out the comparative merit of one religion or society over another. In the same breath then Gandhi went on to state that reverence for the different faiths need not blind one to their defects. He demanded therefore a keen sensitivity to the defects of one's own religion without leaving it on that account, but making every effort to overcome them. This meant for him a duty-bound openness "to blend into our faith every acceptable feature of other faiths." Eclecticism in this sense then was more of a practical virtue than an intellectual weakness.[8]

Gandhi's View of Westernized Christianity

Though Gandhi spoke of religion as a personal matter between the individual and God, he could not but know it also as a matter of deep social and political implications. Yet he took the liberty to reinterpret Christianity as the message of Christ by reducing it quintessentially to the Sermon on the Mount. If allowed such interpretative freedom, he would not have hesitated to declare himself a Christian. But being a professing Hindu, he felt free enough to express his critical opinion that what passed for Western Christianity in his time was an open negation of the Sermon on the Mount. But he was honest enough to admit that people of all faiths fall short of their religiously upheld ideals. The need then, according to him, was not for verbal preaching of Christianity, but the living of lives which imitated and conformed to the teaching of Jesus. Gandhi recognized the same teaching in the Bhagavad-Gita.[9]

If the Sermon on the Mount appealed so much to Gandhi, it was because of Jesus' teaching on non-retaliation and non-resistance to

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8   *From Yeravda Mandir*, 1930, chapters X, XI

9   *Young India*, December 8, 1927

evil. For Gandhi, the truth of the gospels was not about past events even concerning the life and person of Jesus, but about making a future history of non-violent socio-ethical life and action, which concerned every human being on earth. The life and teaching of Jesus were important to that future of humanity, not because he was the one exclusively unique son of God. The divine son-ship of Jesus meant to convey the pragmatically translated sense of the divine son-ship of every human being. Such was the reason for Gandhi's insistence on the ethical teaching of Jesus. It had everything to do with making a new ethical history by way of the non-violent cross of Jesus. This was why Gandhi termed and crowned Jesus a *prince among Satyagrahis*.[10] Gandhi rebelled against orthodox Christianity, as he was convinced that it had distorted the message of Jesus, when it became an imperialist faith with the backing of a Roman Emperor.[11]

What Jesus Meant to Gandhi

Stating that Jesus occupied in his heart the place of one of the great teachers who have made a considerable influence on his life, Gandhi went on to tell fellow Hindus that their lives would be incomplete unless they reverently studied the teachings of Jesus.[12] Though Gandhi could not claim to be a Christian in the sociological or sectarian sense, he asserted that the example of Jesus' suffering was a factor in the composition of his undying faith in non-violence, which ruled all his secular and temporal actions.[13]

The Christians, who unsuccessfully tried to convert Gandhi to Christianity, told him that it was impossible for him to understand the profound significance of Jesus' teachings or to know and interpret the greatest source of spiritual strength that man had ever known, because he had not accepted him as the only Son of God in his heart. Gandhi differed with them and saw theirs as an erroneous point of view, and one incompatible with the message that Jesus had given to

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10   *Young India*, December 31, 1931

11   *Harijan*, May 30, 1936

12   *Gandhi on Christianity*, p. 23, quoting *Gandhi in Ceylon*, p. 143

13   *Harijan*, January 7, 1939

the world. He viewed Jesus as the best *nishkama karmin* the world had known.[14] While accepting Jesus as a great teacher of humanity, Gandhi did not regard him as the only begotten son of God. Literally interpreted, that epithet was unacceptable to Gandhi. It had to be interpreted metaphorically, which would then apply equally to all human beings, even though the term may be applied in a special sense to some.[15]

The fact that Gandhi did not accept Jesus as the only begotten Son of God, as the professing Christians did, did not prevent him from being influenced by his example and teaching. He rightly interpreted that title as meaning spiritual birth:

My interpretation, in other words, is that in Jesus' own life is the key to his nearness to God; that he expressed, as no other could, the spirit and will of God. It is in this sense that I see him and recognize him as the Son of God. But I do believe that something of this spirit that Jesus exemplified in the highest measure, in its most profound human sense, does exist. I must believe this; if I did not believe it, I should be a skeptic; and to be a skeptic is to live a life that is empty and lacks moral content.[16]

Hindu Alternative to Christian Missionary Methods

Though conservative in its non-proselytizing tradition, Hinduism was yet a tolerantly mighty force, as capable of other-assimilative expansion as ever. If Hindus refused to change their religion, it was not because they considered it the best religion, but because they knew that they could complement it by introducing reforms. Gandhi acknowledged that while this was generally true about all great faiths of the world, it was especially true about Hinduism. On this premise, Gandhi went on to ask the Christian missionaries, whose yeomen service to India he acknowledged, if they would not do even better by dropping the proselytizing motive from their philanthropic works. He rightly shared with them his personal question whether, in narrowly

14   *The Modern Review*, October 1941

15   *Harijan*, April 17, 1937

16   *The Modern Review*, October 1941

interpreting the *go ye unto all the world* command of Jesus, the missionaries might not have missed its spirit.[17]

Gandhi's objections to religious conversions stemmed from the material rather than spiritual motivations behind them as well as the avoidable sore they left behind. The third reason was that a change of heart was perfectly possible without having to desert the social precincts of one's ethno-religious community. Gandhi was, on these counts, of the considered opinion that the West had little understood the message of Jesus, because of its hang-up on power, and might need light upon it to be thrown from the East.[18]

Acknowledging a warlike rivalry going on among different religions as to the number of adherents each could boast of in the second decade of the twentieth century India, a missionary himself told Gandhi, "I feel deeply humiliated and feel that in every one of the feats we claim to have performed in converting people to our faith, we are denying our God and being untrue to ourselves." Gandhi told him, that if missionaries truly wanted to serve Christ better, they must pick up the poorest portion of humanity and identify themselves with them, never seeking protection from temporal power, but ever glorying in the strength of God. Serving the needy was to be a reward in itself. Mechanically expecting a Christian confession from them was spiritually superfluous.[19]

Evaluation of Missionary Contribution

A correspondent once asked Gandhi for his evaluation of Christian missionary work in India; whether he thought that Christianity had a contribution to make to the country; and whether India could do without Christianity. Gandhi divided his answer into direct and indirect contribution. The direct was proselytizing, which he rated as probably more harmful than beneficial, because it had not raised the general moral tone of the converts, who had only imbibed the superficialities of European civilization, while missing the ethical teaching of Jesus in practice.

17   *Gandhi on Christianity* p. 31-32, quoting from Speeches and Writings of M.K. Gandhi, pp. 242-44

18   Ibid

19   *Young India*, June 18, 1925

Gandhi rated the indirect contribution of Christian missionary effort as great in two distinct ways. 1. It had stimulated Hindus and Muslims in religious research, forcing them to put their houses in order. 2. It had introduced great educational and curative institutions. The world and India therefore could no more do without the teachings of Christ than without that of Mohammed or the Upanishads. They were in no case exclusive, but complementary in every way, even though their full meaning, interrelations and interdependence were as yet unknown to us, because of our imperfection in representing our faiths.[20]

"Therefore missionaries could stay on in India, if they changed their attitude. Today they tell people that there is no salvation for them except through the Bible and through Christianity. It is customary to decry other religions and to offer their own as the only one that can bring deliverance. That attitude should be radically changed. Let them appear before the people as they are and try to rejoice in seeing Hindus become better Hindus and Muslims better Muslims. Let them start work at the bottom, let them enter into what is best in their life and offer nothing inconsistent with it. That will make their work far more efficacious, and what they will say and offer to the people will be appreciated without suspicion and hostility. In a word, let them go to the people not as patrons, but as one of them, not to oblige them but to serve them and to work among them."[21]

Gandhi's Attitude to Hinduism and the Missionary Attitude

Admiring much in Christianity, while yet being unable to identify himself with it, Gandhi went on to confess how Hinduism entirely satisfied his soul, filled his whole being, and he found a solace in the Bhagavad-Gita and the Upanishads that he missed even in the Sermon on the Mount. The latter did leave a deep impression on him. But when doubts haunted him, disappointments stared him in the face, and when he saw not a single ray of light in the horizon, he turned to the Bhagavad-Gita and found a verse to comfort him, so that he could immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. He confessed to a life full of external tragedies. If they had not left any

20   *Young India*, December 17, 1925

21   *Young India*, July 14, 1927

visibly indelible marks on him, he owed it to the teaching of the Bhagavad-Gita.

Gandhi's India then was not a land of idolatrous heathens, who did not know God. Even its common poor people were noble seekers after God. They might not reason, but they persist in the belief that God is. They depend upon God's assistance and find it. Vile as some of them may be, he found the noblest specimens of humanity also in the midst of all castes. Missionaries then would have to go to the lowly cottages, not to give them something, but to take something from them. Gandhi found such receptiveness, humility and willingness to identify themselves with the masses missing in the missionaries.[22]

As a person strengthening the people's faith, which he found the missionaries undermining, Gandhi recommended to them that their work would be all the richer if they took that faith as a settled fact in which to discover the spiritual presence of God and Christ as the common heritage of all faiths. In the light of this discovery, Gandhi judged it necessary to reinterpret many texts in the Bible and the gospels in a more scientifically inclusive and universal than exclusively particularistic sense:

"The powers of God should not be limited by the limitations of our understanding. To you who have come to teach India, I therefore say, you cannot give without taking. If you have come to give rich treasures of experiences, open your hearts out to receive the treasures of this land, and you will not be disappointed, neither will you have misread the message of the Bible".[23]

Gandhi summed up his assessment of the Christian predicament before other faiths thus:

"Your difficulty lies in your considering the other faiths as false or so adulterated as to amount to falsity. And you shut your eyes to the truth that shines in the other faiths and which gives equal joy and peace to their votaries. I have not hesitated, therefore, to recommend to my Christian friends a prayerful and sympathetic study of the other scriptures of the world. I can give my own humble testimony that, whilst such study has enabled me to give the same respect to them

22   *Young India*, August 6, 1925

23   *Young India*, August 11, 1927

that I give to my own, it has enriched my own faith and broadened my vision."[24]

The Significance of Religious Metaphors

Having made an objective presentation of Gandhi's subjective stand on religions and the conflicts arising from their interactions, it is fair and in order that we add our own personal comments on his stand regarding the various issues touched upon in this essay. While being a conscious socio-political activist of his time, he acted on a philosophy of history which mythically and mystically rather than realistically glorified the past origins of religions. He therefore failed to sense the very origins of religions in ethnic conflicts. But Gandhi was not alone in such idealized reading of the birth of ethnic religions. Many otherwise learned and thinking people also continue to entertain and act on that romantically false assumption.

Gandhi was alive to eclecticism as a sensitive issue in religious circles and intellectual discourse. The stand on eclecticism divides Asian religious traditions between the Semitics' divine revelation and the ethnic historical wisdom of the East and South Asiatics. The Semitics sought to cover up their cognitive dependence on and closure to other ethnic groups through their professed opposition to eclectic knowledge and social practice. But they glorified such negation and closure of their ethnic dependence in the name and authority of the humanly unchallengeable divine, historical revelation. Their so-called revelation then was but a metaphorical veil and negation of the derivation of all their knowledge from other more advanced ethnic individuals or groups. The South and East Asiatics, who were not that arrogant about their knowledge, theologized its progressive social derivation and tradition by attributing the process itself to a divine dispensation which they metaphorically termed avatar. Seeing God behind eclecticism, Gandhi's Hinduism is not ashamed to be eclectic. It may be high time for the Semitic intellectual tradition to re-evaluate its stand on cognitive and societal eclecticism as well as its past historical stand as well as derivation.

A third major area of Gandhi's practical concern with religions is in the sphere of the meaning of religious language, as its interpretation

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24   *Harijan*, January 13, 1940

is a principal source of socio-historical conflicts. Gandhi rightly perceived religious language to be both symbolic and metaphorical, on which counts it needed to be thoughtfully interpreted, instead of being taken literally. The literal usage of words confines their meaning exclusively to the person or object being spoken about, without including the speaker and the addressee within the spoken-of experiential ambit. The metaphorical usage extends its experiential content from the spoken-of person also to the speaker and the addressee. Thus the literal sense is limited to the uniquely particular, while the metaphorical is potentially universal.

Its problematic aspect comes to the fore only when we apply this generalization concretely to Jesus as Christ the only begotten son of God. The problem is whether the title, which this phrase describes, is to be understood literally or metaphorically. Its literal application would confine the title uniquely to Jesus in an adorable divine isolation and idolatry. Its metaphorical interpretation would potentially include all humans and the rest of creation within a relationship of divine filiation. It would render the whole of creation and humanity a mirror-image and temple of God's presence.

The actual meaning of language in general and of metaphorical language in particular is determined by its contextual intent or purpose The original intent and purpose of any linguistic metaphor is not the claim of a divine revelation of an absolutely and eternally existing metaphysical truth, uniquely made known to a poet or prophetically oratorical genius, but a subconsciously creative and ingenious human device meant to persuade belief and an action consistent with such belief. The truth of a metaphor then is not metaphysical but pragmatically socio-ethical and historic. The metaphor transposes its speaker and hearers from their world of severely limited and sordid reality to a world of new possibilities, if only they will what the metaphor imaginatively projects. Beliefs then are imaginative societal hypotheses to which human groups are ready to commit and wager their lives. They then assume that collective life, ethical action and identity as proving the truth of those beliefs. What is not objectively evident by itself is affirmed to be such by collective assertion and symbolic action, because they are able to hold the collectivity in intimate social cohesion.

Even as imaginatively projected pictures of possible reality, metaphors stem from and relate to individual and collective ethnic

histories. Every ethnic individual and group owns its own unique historical images and metaphors. Hence one ethnic metaphor cannot be imposed or transposed on another ethnic individual or group without doing violence to the consistent identity of that individual and group. When it happens, it is imperialist in practice, to which eclecticism is preferable as a sympathetic form understanding and toleration of cultural difference and diversity within one and the same ethnic identity. Gandhi's critique of Christian missionary practice and ideology as social artifacts therefore seems to be grounded on sound social principles..

Imposing one cultural-historical metaphor on another cultural-historical group is suppressive of one culture as inferior to another. As based on such assumed cultural superiority and inferiority, such imposition makes of religion an ideological metaphor of racism, glorifying itself with new metaphorical titles or claims of divine commands or revealed truths. They become circuitous ways of legitimizing racist and cultural imperialist superiority, instanced in the claims that Vedic Aryans and their contemporary Israeli people made in the names of their gods about the earlier inhabitants of the land who opposed their advance into the respective territories.

The occasion on which religious language turns so ideological is when an ethnic group, in rivalry with another, loses sensitivity to its metaphors for ethnically competitive advantage and reduces them from their theological transcendence to the status of un-poetically literal and prosaic words of simple immanence. Gandhi observed this process taking place also when the Christian credal formulas are taught to new Church entrants and got back from them as objective matter-of-fact answers to questions posed, rather than as subjectively participated meaning and experience. In thus exposing the unspiritual nature and function of fundamentalistically organized ethnic religiosity, Gandhi recalls all religious traditions to recognize one another's analogously unique contribution to realizing humanity's essential unity in nature and purpose.

Arulkadal
Jesuit Regional Theologate
98 Santhome High Road
Chennai - 600028

Book Review

Theology of the Church: New Horizons, Kuncheria Pathil (Dharmaram Publications, Bangalore, 2006, pp. 230)

Kuncheria Pathil needs no introduction among the Asian theologians. He has written a number of books and articles on Ecclesiology as well as Ecumenism and has held very responsible positions in the Indian Theological Association and Congress of Asian Theologians. He is also the former president of Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, a pioneering theological centre in Asia. Besides being a guest professor in various theological centres, he is presently the acting Director of Jeevadhara Dept of Socio-Religious Research , affiliated to Mahatma Gandhi University, and Associate General Editor of *Jeevadhara*, a theological monthly published in English and Malayalam. Enriched by his long teaching experience K.Pathil is blessed with a lucid style of presentation of complex theological issues with clarity and precision. He is a man of dialogue – in both theory and practice -dialogue with other theologians, ecclesiastical authorities, other Churches, and other religions .

The present volume under review deals with new horizons in ecclesiology. The book is built up in ten chapters, covering the significant areas of ecclesiology. The first chapter, though titled 'Communion of Churches in the early centuries', is in fact an historical analysis of the evolution of papacy. Here the Trinitarian root of communion ecclesiology – communion without domination or subordination – is brought out convincingly. In the second chapter, the author presents the oft-discussed theme of paradigm shift in Vatican II in a systematic manner in eight steps and it serves as introduction to the rest of the book. He is guided by the insight of Vatican II that Catholic Church stands not in opposition to other Christian Churches, or other religions or even the world at large, it lives in participation and dialogue with all in its pilgrim journey.

The third chapter with the title 'The Self-understanding of the Church in India Today' is in fact a cluster of two issues presented in three parts. In the first and second parts, the self-understanding of the Church is explored from two dimensions, viz. Jesus' Movement before the institutionalization of the Church and the self-understanding and self-expression of the Church in its historical development. In these two sections, he throws light on the perennially valid ecclesial elements and the relative or transitory elements. In the third part, he draws its consequences for the Church in India. The mystery dimension of the

Church should not make us complacent, but provoke and prompt us at every juncture of history to be always open to new and greater exploration leading to ever new socio-historical, cultural and religious expressions of the empirical church or local churches everywhere. The double perspective of Jesus movement embedded in the values of the Kingdom of God and the historical conditioning of every human endeavour should guide us in our pursuit of going beyond the present structures, doctrines and rituals (ecclesia semper reformanda).

The fourth chapter 'Towards a theology of the Local Church' is a significant study from the historical and doctrinal perspectives. Based on an examination of concepts like 'inculturation' (interculturation), collegiality of bishops, 'reception' (of dogma) and 'sensus fidelium' (consensus fidelium) he pleads for a delicate balance between the legitimate autonomy and the necessary communion of local churches. In the fifth chapter dealing with Theology of the Laity, the author explains the historical evolution of the Church from a communion model to a pyramidal hierarchical model due to the influence of Roman imperium and the return to the communion model in Vatican II based on the realization that all believers form a priestly and prophetic people endowed with 'sensus fidei'. He also points out that the significant role of the laity in the non-catholic Churches of today could be an inspiration for us to re-introduce and regain the lost status of the laity in the Catholic Church. The next chapter dealing with magisterium and sensus fidelium he goes on to explain the rich content of the concept of 'sensus fidelium' which we have lost sight of in the course of history and pleads for a recovery of it to understand the manifold dimensions of Revelation as communication and to ascertain the scope and limits of magisterium as we have it today. From the hermeneutical perspective, he defines theology as 'the interpretation of Christian faith in the context of contemporary existential realities and the interpretation of contemporary realities in the light of Christian faith' (p.146). However, here he misses the fundamental criterion of interpretation, viz. 'life and praxis of Christ' (Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff). The 12 points he picks up from the texts of the Councils regarding the role of magisterium and 'sensus fidelium' and the seven questions he poses for reflection and study are relevant challenges to every theologian.

The seventh chapter deals with the inter-ecclesial relations in India. Quoting extensively from the documents of Vatican II and based on the appraisal of the present situation of Church in India the author makes it amply clear that those who are responsible to grant equal rights to Oriental Churches in India have miserably failed in this respect. Legislative, executive and judiciary rights being invested in one instance,

who else can be held responsible for this situation? However the statement that "1599 was the darkest year in the history of St. Thomas Christians" (p.168) is an exaggerated one, since we know from the acts of the synod of Udayamperoor that a number of unchristian customs and practices were abolished through its decisions. However the hurdles faced by the Oriental Catholic Churches to get their legitimate rights respected by their sister church and its head quarters in Vatican – which is often confused with the head quarters of all the 22 sui juris Churches of catholic communion – prompts them to raise the question: "Is the present doctrinal position that catholic Church is a communion of Churches and the articles in the Code of canon law on 'sui juris' churches only a bait to attract the non-catholic churches" ?

Chapter eight is a résumé of the debate on infallibility, especially the arguments of Hans Kueng as well as his critics. He then proposes his own observation, which gives some insight to carry on the reflection and discussion on the topic. The next chapter deals with the Basic Christian Communities and here the author examines at length the historical circumstances in which BCCs took shape in Latin American Church. He explains its characteristics with special emphasis on the role of the laity as well as its communitarian and prophetic character. As far as India is concerned, he proposes Basic Human Communities, for which the BCCs can take up the facilitating role. The final chapter points out signs of hope in the Church in spite of its imperfections and shortcomings. In a fitting conclusion to the foregoing reflections he places his trust and confidence in 'the basic goodness of human nature', 'the movements of the Spirit in the history of the Church', 'the awakening of the laity, especially the women' and in the newly emerging structures in the Church such as Synod of Bishops and Regional/National Episcopal Conferences.

The book under review gives a wealth of information to any reader interested in the developments in contemporary ecclesiology, it gives insight and clarity to the students of theology and it broadens the perspective of fellow theologians. Though it is mainly a collection of articles published in various theological journals, they are thoroughly revised and edited to fit into a central theme (p.10). Except for the last chapter, the book is very comfortably readable and well presented. I would recommend this book to all students of theology as a necessary requirement in their course of studies.

St. Francis Theological College   Mathew Paikada
Kottayam – 686 016